

# ALPHA CONTINUUM 4







SHONA JACKSON  
8009.05



# ALPHA CONTINUUM 3

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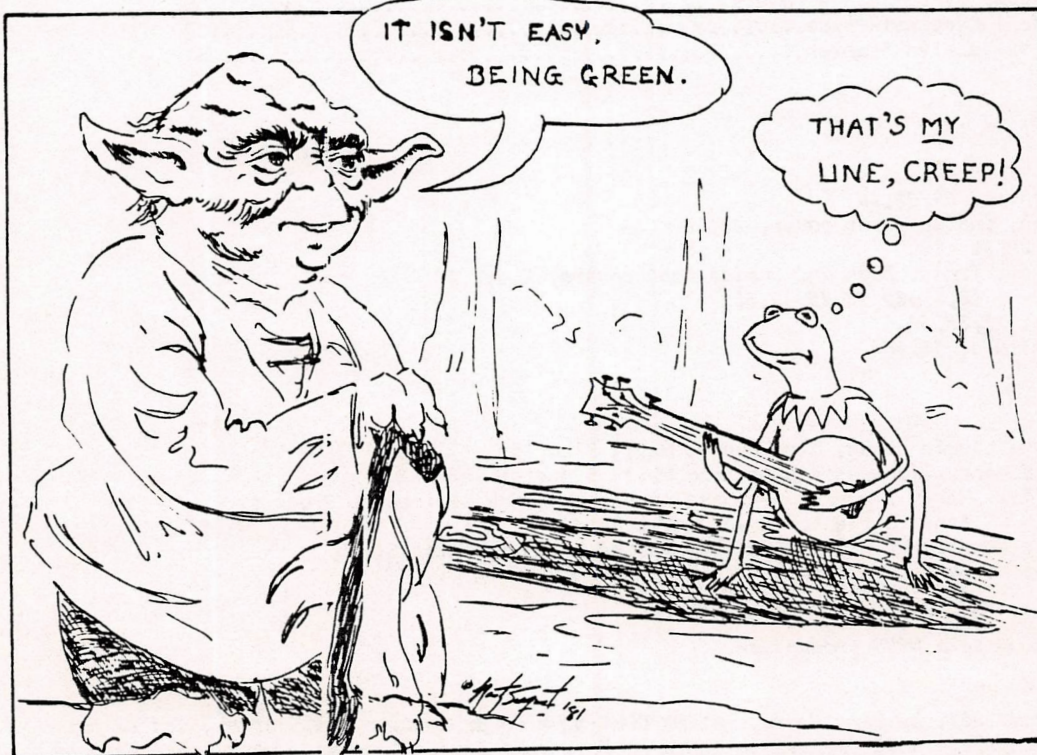
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# Of 3s' and 4s'

Greetings:

What you finally have before you is ALPHA CONTINUUM #3. To try and set things straight for all those we have confused with our numbering system (printed before this issue were issues 1, 2, and 4) we have decided, at least outwardly, to also call this issue #4. After all, who ever heard of printing #4 before #3? So now we have instead printed #4 before #4. Doesn't that make much more sense?

Actually somewhere between drawing and printing, 'zine fairies got to the cover. Hopefully the next issue of ALPHA CONTINUUM will be #5 and everything will once again make sense.

In any event this is the Spock issue of ALPHA CONTINUUM and it is also issue #3, no matter what else you may have read. Unlike the last two issues, this one does not have a second name printed on the cover. Unlike Marty, who gets cosmic cover revelations at four in the morning, I only get yelled at by the cats, and yawned at by my dog. With this sort of inspiration names such as "Italic Inserts" and "I Like Dreaming" slink out of the cosmic murk and neither of them seems as appropriate as ALPHA CONTINUUM #4. Like I always say: when you find a good name, stick with it.

Moving on, I would like to thank the following people: all of the writers and artists who came through with such short and weird deadlines, (no, A.L.L., that isn't you); Darlene for doing wonderful printing on short notice (with professors yelling that their printing is more important); Mrs. Siegrist for allowing us to wallpaper and carpet her house with Spock covers; my bosses Kriss Ostrom and Darren Meahl for being very understanding about disappearing typewriter elements; and especially Marty and Anne Laurie for all of their help and encouragement, ~~such as it was~~.

Oh well, enough talk, I have several pages of transfer lettering that I have to remove the number fours from before turning editorial control of this zine back over to Marty.

Enjoy.

*Lina*







# Hostage of Fortune

Anne Laurie Logan

It was almost a week, ship's time, before Spock first met any of the diplomatic party from Hagar. If he had know in advance what contact with the Hagarites would do to his precious sense of Vulcan balance and harmony, he might have chosen to avoid them altogether.

He was not prepared to step into Sickbay on an ordinary afternoon and be confronted with a small child demanding instruction in the life-support indicators from Christine Chapel. He hesitated, stabbed by a sudden surge of that instinctive and shameful desire that is, for a Vulcan, less fatal than but nearly as painful as *pon faar*. From his earliest childhood, he had been taught that the need to nurture one's own offspring was an inevitable biological drive, as ultimately irresistible as any other physiological urge. Only when he was much older had the flaws in those instructions become evident to him.

Nurse Chapel looked up at the sound of the door, her face alight with a not dissimilar pleasure in sharing the vivid and unbounded curiosity only available to the very young. Even her usual turmoil of emotions when around him could not detract from her interest in the little girl.

"This is Tiriana, Mr. Spock. Her mother is one of the delegates from Hagar. Tiriana, Mr. Spock is the First Officer of the *Enterprise* -- the most important man on the ship after the captain."

Tiriana, sitting on the examining couch with her legs curled under her, tilted her head up to look him in the eyes as he approached. She had a thin, pointed face, with very dark eyes to match her black hair -- *like a Vulcan child*, he thought -- and she did not squirm or fidget as did most of the toddlers he had seen. "You're a Vulcan, I think," she said to him. "My mother Joanna told me about the Vulcans. Are you a real Vulcan?"

*How can I answer that?* flashed through his mind. *I've spent my whole life trying to find that out...*

But he did not have to answer her, after all. Dr. McCoy had entered the room from the inner door, coming out of the lab. Spock had read of people snarling, but he had never experienced quite so animal a noise coming from a human throat.

"How *dare* you, Nurse! Get that -- you get out of my sickbay! Now!"

Spock stared at him, wondering if it were possible for a man, even a human, to entirely lose his sanity within the space of a few hours. Nothing in any of McCoy's many and confusing moods had ever indicated that the doctor could be capable of so intense and irrational an anger -- nothing Spock knew of the man or the doctor had warned that he was capable of such cruelty. He looked back to Chapel, and saw that she displayed all the marks of a guilty conscience.

"But, Dr. McCoy, she -- she, er, fainted -- "

They had been so absorbed in their emotional thunderstorm that none of the adults heard the outer door slide open again. Spock shifted hastily to one side as a woman spoke behind him.

"Never mind, Christine. It was a game attempt, but Leonard McCoy would never sacrifice his moral standards for the words of some outmoded oath they used in medical school..."



Tiriana put a conclusive period to all conversation by suddenly and silently keeling over sideways.

Christine gasped and grabbed at the child, whose back stiffened and bowed as her limbs began to twitch spasmodically. The newcomer pushed past Spock and ran to the medical bed, expertly reaching for the convulsive child's head. The spasm, however, ended almost as quickly as it had begun; Tiriana suddenly relaxed, rolled away from the women attempting to restrain her, and sat up, apparently unharmed and only a little confused by the interruption.

"Is *that* my grandfather?" she said, staring in distaste at the Chief Surgeon.

Spock had been watching McCoy. The doctor had not moved even a facial muscle since his outburst.

The dark-haired woman picked up the little girl and turned towards the door -- and Mr. Spock.

It was, indeed, Joanna McCoy. Since Spock had first met her four years ago, human emotions had put lines of stress across her too-broad forehead and around the rather weak mouth she'd had the misfortune to inherit from her father. Her formerly glossy and fastidiously-tended hair was as lank as that of a sick animal. Her pudgy cheeks were thinner. But neither stress nor maturity could change her dark eyes, widely spaced, or the lines of her eyebrows set in a look of perpetual puzzlement over the seemingly unfinished nose. She looked much older, much less rational. She paused, obviously about to sweep out of the room, and said, "Her helmet. Where did you leave it, Ti?"

He moved to pick up the little cap almost before he had realized what the shape on the floor by the couch meant. A few steps forward, cautiously, as though the instability of the inhabitants' feelings might have affected even the solidity of the deck; a few steps back, and he handed her the pathetic little dome. Their eyes met for the first time, and she tried to smile at him. It did something unfortunate to the muscles at the corners of her mouth.

"Thank you, Mr. Spock," Joanna muttered as she lowered her head and hurried out of the room.

Spock knew, along with every other crewmember, why the Hagarites were aboard. Their tiny, unprosperous planet had unwillingly become a bone of contention between the Federation and the Klingons, but this did not inspire him with the somewhat guilt-tinged compassion a few of his shipmates professed. The fact that the Federation's final successful consolidation of their territory had left their one poor city in rubble did not horrify him. Even the unpleasant task of transporting a team of survivors to the nearest Starbase -- a delegation that was, bluntly, reduced to suing for the mercy of its powerful new ally -- moved him neither to pity, nor to the loud-voiced jingoism of the younger and less imaginative *Enterprise* crewmen.

The closest thing to an emotional response that Spock allowed himself when considering the Hagarites was a sort of triumphant exasperation, always couched in the most refined of logical terms.

He knew that many non-Terran races considered the Vulcans cowards, hypocrites, or worse for having so quietly submitted to the boisterous "justice" meted out by the Federation. But joining the Federation, when first faced by a "diplomatic mission" armed with spaceships that were little more than well-manned flying weapons, had been the only logical way.

Vulcan was not prepared, physically or ideologically, to dispute the finer points of interplanetary protocol with one of the most belligerent races in the known universe. Nor were the people of Vulcan liable to abandon endless centuries of philosophical speculation in a vulgar drive to defeat the humans in aggressiveness.

(It had seemed to Spock, when he was a child, that mature Vulcans did not even resent the occasional incursions into the peace of the planet made by their vigorous "partners" in the Federation. Surely resenting a human for being violent and emotional would have been as illogical as resenting a sehlat for being carnivorous. Humans, like sehlat, had virtues of their own. Harmony can also be sought through diversity. And the necessary embassies and other diplomatic ties with the wide range of starbases and outposts provided a convenient outlet for deviant individuals who could not quite encompass all of the stern beauties of the highest Vulcan philosophy.)

The fate of Hagar meant nothing more to Spock than one more illustration in a long series of incidents demonstrating that Vulcan logic had, again, proved the truest and best solution to any problem. It had been stupid of the Hagarites not to accept membership in the Federation when it was first offered to them. But they were, of course, only humans, and therefore illogical by definition.



He planned it out, logically. He wanted to see her again -- purely from intellectual curiosity. The young woman he had known for those few weeks of her transport aboard the *Enterprise* had been a rarity among humans and a veritable anomaly among human females. She had not regarded him as a freak that she could channel her xenophobia through; she had not fantasized him as a mysterious beast-prince out of a Terran fairy tale, another victim to mirror her own loneliness. He had been, to Joanna, merely another mind, gifted with technical and scientific secrets she wished to explore. It had been strangely refreshing to discuss the computers of the *Enterprise* with someone who wished to learn not from need, or a desire to stand well with a command superior, but only for the sake of learning.

It seemed rationally impossible that the barely-mature woman he remembered could have so rapidly aged into a defensive mother-beast. It seemed equally impossible that the usually gentle -- even feckless -- Dr. McCoy should develop so unnatural a hatred for his own genetic offspring.

The women of the Hagar mission seemed to spend most of their time confined together in their own quarters, but naturally a child like Tiriana could not be caged that way. He sought out a recreation room -- not the one nearest the diplomatic section -- during the "night" shift, when the majority of the crew was liable to be asleep or in their private rooms.

"Christine can't help being -- what she is. She's a loving person, and she loves most where it's needed most. If she makes the mistake of assuming that we're all as straightforward in our desires as she is... well, that's not a flaw in *her*. I'm sorry I snapped at her." Joanna paused and stirred her coffee, frowning into the cup. "But I won't make the mistake of looking for her in Sickbay when I want to apologize."

Tiriana, wearing her helmet like an improbable crown, had taken the figures from several of the deserted three-deck chessboards. She crooned to herself as she paraded a caravan around the base of the next table. Spock watched her for a moment before turning back to her mother.

"It seems that you had some -- indications that your... that the Chief Surgeon would not welcome your presence, or your child's. Logic would indicate that you must have an extremely strong reason for volunteering your services to this mission..."

She was looking at her daughter as Tiriana scooted on her knees in a slow spiral away from their table.

"I... I don't know how much you know about Hagar, Mr. Spock."

He did not reply, apart from arching one eyebrow.

"We are -- at least, we *were* -- a separatist planet. All the colonists were women. We wanted... we thought... we hoped that we could make a new world for ourselves, a world where we wouldn't be locked into second-class citizenship just because we were born in the wrong gender."

"I had noted such behavior among humans -- even among Federation scientists," Spock said carefully. "Most illogical."

(That had been one of the most shocking facets of human behavior for him, when he had first entered the Starfleet Academy: the discovery that otherwise intelligent and well-educated male classmates talked about women as though they were chattel, and children as though they were unnecessary encumbrances to an adult career. He had been so repelled then that he almost came to agree with his father. That was the closest he had ever been to returning to Vulcan... contrasting the brutish, rutting insensitivity of his dorm-mates, and the servile posturing of the women they seemed to prefer, to the rational beauty and dignity of a Vulcan family group. His mother's slightly subservient deference to Sarek had frequently embarrassed him when other Vulcans were present; not until he went to Earth had he found the roots of Amanda's logically inexplicable habits.)

Joanna sighed. "When I left Starfleet Academy... I wanted to get away from all the stupid, self-satisfied men who thought that their -- that having a *y*-chromosome made them the kings of the universe! I -- I dropped out in the middle of my first year, and ran away to the nearest metropolitan cluster, and found a group of radical separatist women to get involved with..."

Her eyes softened. "Then I met Therese. She was just about to emigrate to Hagar... so I went back to the Academy and handed in a formal resignation, and insisted on my contractual right to be transported to the planet of my choice."



Memories of that younger, surer Joanna changed the contours of her face and lifted the corners of her mouth. "That was when we first encountered each other, Mr. Spock, when I was slotted onto the *Enterprise* to be dropped at Hagar. I was already pregnant with Tiriana, though I don't think anyone knew but my f... but Dr. McCoy."

Spock asked, "And... Tiriana's other parent?"

"Why, Therese, of course -- through artificial genetic combination and laboratory implantation. I chose to carry her because emigration ships don't usually provide the, ah, amenities of a Starfleet cruiser." She snorted. "Did you wonder if I'd been dumped by some man?"

He looked away, apparently searching for Tiriana, who was still busy with the chess pieces. "Logic demanded that all alternatives be considered."

"Yet they tell us Vulcans have no sense of humor!" She chuckled, and added, soberly, "Of course, it practically *killed*... the doctor." She shrugged. "I'd been enough of a disappointment to him just being born female -- he wanted a son to take over his practise someday. I didn't think, then, that it mattered how angry he was. It wouldn't have mattered, if we hadn't been caught in the war..."

She must have sensed some sort of disapproval in his posture or his countenance. "All right, the military engagement. We didn't want to be beholden to the Federation, even though we had no reason to love the Klingons. When the warships came out of the sky..." An intense sadness, a sense of loss deeper than any Spock had ever met from a human, lanced from her. She shuddered.

"We hadn't expected it, we weren't prepared. We didn't think we were so important -- and we weren't important, except as a symbol. As a... *pawn*..."

"The warships..." he prodded gently.

She looked past him, to her daughter perhaps, or to her memories. "The Federation said it was the Klingons. The Klingons say -- but we are a Federation territory, now." Her tone grew bleaker. "When they bombed Demeter with lasers -- when the city went up in flames -- Therese and Tiriana had gone in for supplies. I was stuck out on the farm center, running a cereal crop simulation... we lost fourteen of our centermates, out of the eighteen who'd made that trip."

"And Therese was one of them... Fourteen out of twenty-four. And we were considered *lucky*."

Her pain was now explicable, against the measure of her loss. Something like shame wormed uneasily in Spock's mind. In an unimportant engagement on a backwards planet, she had lost her mate, most of her clan, her intellectual ideals, her hopes for the future.

Joanna regained control of the rage and pain staining her tone. "They found Tiriana when they -- they dug the bodies out of the rubble. It's a miracle, they tell me, that she lived at all. But... something went wrong. I can't understand it, they couldn't explain it to me -- I don't know about biology, I'm an engineer." She checked to see where Tiriana was, and lowered her voice.

"They tell me -- but I don't get the impression they really understand it themselves -- at least, we agree that it did something to her brain. She -- you saw one of her convulsions."

"She's been like that since the bombing. They can't tell me why -- maybe she got hit on the wrong part of her skull when the walls collapsed, or she was looking the wrong way when the light-system exploded, I don't *care* about that part. But the convulsions are getting worse... the doctors said that brain cells were being slowly destroyed..."

Spock twisted to look at the child again. She didn't look particularly ill.

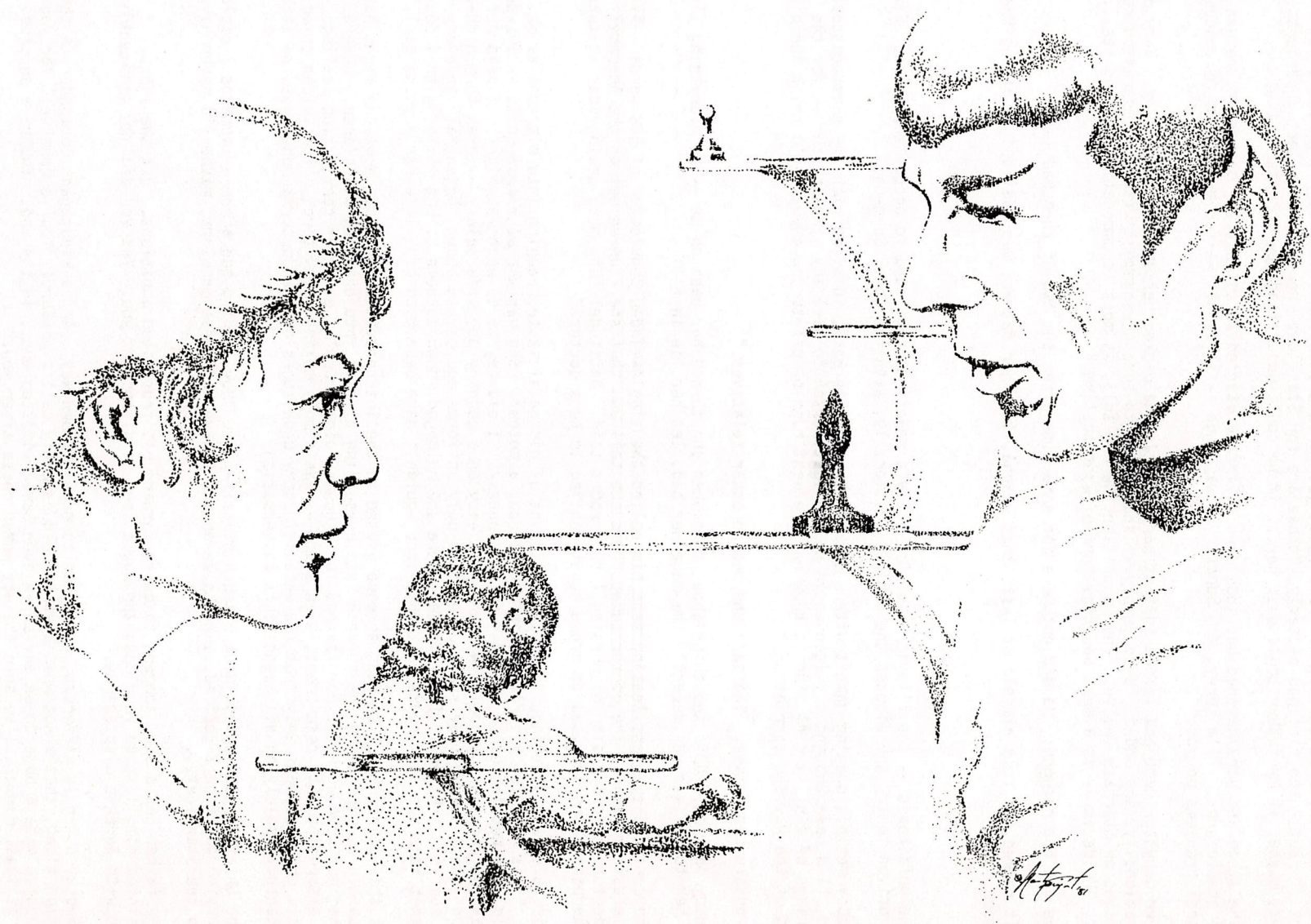
"Oh, physically she's fine -- nothing but a broken wrist and some bad bruises. She had two enormous black eyes, she looked like a raccoon for a month..." Joanna blinked fiercely. "But I am assured that, unless we can find some way to halt the progressive convulsions, within a few months -- maybe as much as a year or so -- Tiriana will be a very healthy vegetable."

"Does... is she aware that...?" Spock paused. Suddenly his lips were dry, and he did not trust his voice.

She shrugged. "She knows that she's sick, and going to get sicker. She says she can't remember the attacks at all. I don't -- I haven't told her what the doctors predicted. And I don't think she could have understood anything she might have heard by accident."

He asked, "You have reason to believe that the Federation..."







She nodded. "You have the best doctors, you have the finest medical centers and the newest techniques and the best equipment. If I could get Tiriana into one of the Starfleet neurology centers... But," she finished bitterly, "those are for Starfleet crews and Starfleet dependents! I thought, maybe, if my father could *meet* her... if he could understand how important it was..."

She stood and straightened her shoulders. Tiriana started to collect the pieces and return them to the chessboards. "I'm sorry, Mr. Spock. It was rude -- illogical -- for me to dump my unseemly emotional problems on you."

Her daughter came and leaned against her leg; Joanna picked her up and turned away. Very dryly, very rationally, she added, "Undoubtably we shall come to some arrangement with the Federation representatives on Starbase Twelve. The Federation, we are told, is most accommodating towards its... allies. Pride is -- is a most unworthy form of emotionalism."

He did not respond. He did not move for some time after the two of them had left.

It seemed, he told himself at last, that Joanna, like her father, was addicted to having the last word.

The unfairness -- the illogic -- of Dr. McCoy's reactions continued to occupy Mr. Spock. Finally he was driven to try and discuss the subject, rationally, with the Chief Surgeon.

McCoy met his opening gambit with a snort. Turning his back, fumbling with the electronscope, he said, "I'd have thought a Vulcan would be the last person to have any sympathy for -- for the maunderings of a silly girl. Don't know why she went runnin' off to you anyway, y'd think she'd be ashamed of the way she carried on."

"You are her father. She said she had no other relatives."

McCoy wheeled. "Did she think about that when she turned her back on me -- on everything I'd raised her to believe was decent? She made her bed, let her lie in it!"

The confused emotions leaking from him belied the single-minded conviction of his words. After the briefest of pauses, the doctor added, "Did she tell you that she flunked out of the Academy? 'No aptitude for the profession of nursing,' the report said. Aptitude! How much brains does it take to carry bedpans? And she used to argue about wanting to be a doctor!"

His voice was slurring, the peculiar accent of his natal state creeping into his tone as he spoke. "It's hard for a girl, growin' up without a mother. She was the *clumsiest* child -- awkward as a pig at a weddin' dance -- and just as mannerly. I did *try* to do what was right. I paid her bills at the very best schools, which wasn't easy on a country doctor's salary -- even them high-class Northrun schools where they stuffed 'em into ugly uniforms and talked about "potential" in every second sentence. Maybe if I'd kept her where she belonged, down to home... but livin' with a doctor who wasn't home but six hours in twenty-four wouldn't have been much of a life for a young girl."

At this point, Spock sensed, someone gifted in the interpretation of human emotions might have been capable of persuading the surgeon into persuading himself into changing his stance. However, Spock had not been born to, nor trained for, such a role. McCoy's welter of conflicting feelings -- anger, disappointment, resentment, even shame -- was simply making Spock tired. The Vulcan tried to force his consciousness away from the unsatisfactory undertones of the doctor's monologue; he attempted to concentrate solely on his associate's conversation.

The Chief Surgeon added, with a touch of self-pity, "Now, if I'd had a *son* -- someone I could see carryin' on after I retired... Maybe we wouldn't have had these problems, maybe I'd never have entered the Starfleet..."

"My father had a son, someone to carry forward his frustrated ambitions. But the son... disappointed him, just as your daughter would seem to disappoint you. Yet you did not noticeably sympathize with Sarek's displeasure."

"Spock, a man is different, a man has to make his own way. And a Lieutenant Commander in the Federation fleet, that's not what anyone could decently call a *failure*! You've done well for yourself, you've made a name to be envied -- even Sarek admitted that, in the end. You're a success. You're at least *normal*, I've seen the way women chase after you."

*Does being chased by a dog make a rabbit a carnivore?* Spock thought bitterly. Habit -- and the



fact that McCoy was obviously in an emotional state rendering him unfit to listen to reason -- made him remain silent.

McCoy had decided to brood over his wrongs. "You never ran off with some bunch of perverts. Maybe if her mother..." He shook his head. "I blame myself for that. Ariana came from one of the best families. I didn't know about the bad strain, then. But I should have seen how things were falling apart a lot sooner than I did. Well, she's dead now -- poor tormented soul -- and her daughter, thank god, is no responsibility of mine any more!"

The doctor dropped the lens he'd been handling. Spock chose to forestall the inevitable. This time, he turned and walked out of the office.

He decided to mention the unsatisfactory conversation that evening when he saw Joanna. He realized, somewhat uneasily, that he had drifted into the habit of going back to that rec room at about the same time every evening... and, he further recalled, Joanna and Tiriana usually seemed to be waiting there. He pushed that chain of thought aside, firmly.

For some reason of fashion or timing, very few crewmembers came in to use the room while they were there. Since the first meeting, the two adults had been careful to keep the conversation away from emotions: they discussed computer systems, fine points of engineering theory, technical works and information manuals. Sometimes he talked to Tiriana about the places he had visited, all the worlds he'd known so little and so briefly. Sometimes, he and Joanna played chess, with the little girl kibbitzing. Tiriana had a fine imaginative flair, if no understanding of the mechanics of the game...

She was, he thought, an exceptionally bright child. She asked unusually mature questions, sometimes surprised him with a vivid turn of phrase or poetic imagery. She seemed to have better manners than most of the human children he had encountered -- she could play quietly on her own for a long time, and at her most obstreperous she never screamed or sniveled.

It did not occur to him that he was at a vulnerable stage of his life. He did not notice that he was only around her for an hour or two a day, in a situation where she might be expected to display her best qualities. It seemed a terrible waste that so quick and questing a mind stood in danger of slow destruction...

Joanna grimaced as he finished presenting a much-abbreviated version of his talk with the doctor. "I suppose I should find this... amusing," she said. "But I've never had much of a sense of humor. Dr. McCoy's humor was so, ah, *generous* in its proportions, there wouldn't have been room for two of us in the same house anyway. I guess I should be grateful that he sent me away as soon as he could."

"I have often been informed that the Surgeon is a... warm and jovial individual."

"Well, you're not the only one who doesn't care for his 'entertaining' habit of jabbing at sore spots! I understand that he can't show affection in any less obnoxious ways, but sometimes I'm surprised my mother lasted as long as she did."

He shot her a look of guarded inquiry. "McCoy said something about his late wife... I did not understand..."

She shrugged, visibly annoyed. "Mother... Ariana was never a strong woman. Later she felt that things might have worked out better if I'd been the son the Doctor wanted, but... humans marry for the most irrational reasons. His practice wasn't going well, and -- frankly, he was drinking a lot more than he should have. She needed someone to support her, someone to hold her together, and he had too many problems of his own to cope with hers. When she started to make trouble, he got rid of her."

She turned away from the table, looked away from him. "No, that's not fair. I didn't think she belonged in an institution, but I was too young to do anything but argue. And Daddy was, after all, a *doctor* -- everyone thought he knew best. Especially him. Well, I'm far enough away from the situation now that I can sort of see it must have been hard on the man, but from the letters the two of them sent me at school it looked like he'd just found her... inconvenient."

Tiriana wandered over and leaned against her lap for a moment. When the child had moved off, she added, "Therese pointed out to me, later, that he did display a demented sort of sense of fitness -- he'd sent me off to school, and Ariana into a nursing home, and finally he signed up with Starfleet and, ah, *committed* himself to another special institution. What little compassion I have, I learned from her. She could forgive people -- my blood relatives have never been very good at forgiving..."





Something almost a smile lurked in her eyes for a moment. "You know, Mr. Spock, for a couple of years after that -- I was in my teens then -- I really wished I'd been born a Vulcan. It seemed so much more intelligent, so much *easier*, not to have to cope with feelings..."

He suppressed a strong urge to laugh bitterly, and chose his words with care. "My own... the woman who heads my clan still does not approve of the fact that I left Vulcan. And my father Sarek -- this is a thing I do not understand. Sarek assumed that, as his only son, I would *logically* continue his career in the Vulcan Science Academy. When I chose instead to enter Starfleet, we did not speak for twenty years."

A crease appeared between his brows. "Dr. McCoy was most unsympathetic to my father's position. The Surgeon was, in fact, instrumental in... reconciling the two of us, as far as was possible. That man -- it is not logical that the Dr. McCoy who argued with Sarek so persuasively is the same McCoy who rejects his own offspring for quite similar reasons."

"We're only humans, Mr. Spock. Humans aren't logical."

He sighed.

So did she. "Anyway... if I hadn't been so -- so emotionally involved with the idea of being, or at least imitating, a Vulcan, I'd never have become a computer technician. And if I hadn't been tied up with that program the day of the war, I'd have gone into the city, and I'd probably be dead too."

He could not tell whether this was a source of gladness or of sorrow to her. He wanted to move away from the subject. "If it is not too personal a question, what became of your mother?"

"There was a flu epidemic -- one of the dangerous mutant strains -- and the home was understaffed." All emotion had dropped out of her voice. "I didn't even know she was dead until they started returning my letters."

The two of them sat in silence while the minutes stretched out. At last, without further discussion, she started to set up the pawns for another game of chess.

Shortly afterwards, Spock found himself alone in the turbolift with Captain Kirk. The two of them had just finished a duty shift on the bridge. Kirk had entered first, and automatically ordered the 'lift to the level of the gym; usually Spock or any other passengers would wait until he'd been dropped



off and then route their own instructions. But the captain paused, crossed his arms over his chest, tipped his head quizzically, and asked (with an ingratiating grin), "What the hell's been eating on you, Spock?"

The Vulcan shifted position guiltily. He hadn't spent much time with Jim recently, discounting their joint shifts; he hadn't had much attention to spare from his confused consideration of the problems of the various McCoy's.

As though he could read his mind, Kirk added, "This got something to do with those women from Hagar?"

A new consideration dawned upon Spock. James Kirk was renowned for his experience with women. And, again, anything that affected the Chief Surgeon unfavorably was properly the responsibility of the Captain.

"There is a child among the Hagarite ambassadors."

"You mean the one in a funny hat. I didn't think she was a *midget*."

"It is not a 'hat'; it is a protective helmet. The child has periodic, unpredictable convulsive attacks. It is important that she be protected from further -- from damage to her skull. The child is the daughter of a woman named Joanna McCoy, and Joanna McCoy -- "

" -- Is the daughter of Bones, which is presumably why he's been snapping at poor Chapel every time I check Sickbay." Kirk stopped and considered the matter solemnly. "Joanna sure has coarsened a lot in the past year or two. I'd never have recognized that girl among all those long faces." He fixed Spock with a suspicious stare and added, "I don't suppose you'd be able to, hmm, 'explicate' this matter for me?"

Spock chose to interpret this as an order. It was something of a mental release to present his companion with a recital of the facts, stressing the dangerous drain upon the Chief Surgeon's attentions. Perhaps he chose to gloss over some of the less central bits of information gleaned from his conversations with the principals. But logically he should not have been speaking on such terms with Joanna at all, and therefore in normal circumstances would never have learned of them.

While he was speaking, the two of them had arrived at gym level and started walking to the exercise room. Jim loved a good challenge; Spock had barely finished his recital before Kirk had called the medical section and informed McCoy that he was on his way over.

By the time Kirk strode into the doctor's own lab and ordered Nurse Chapel out of the room, Spock had begun to regret his garrulousness. In





the next hour, waiting silently while McCoy sulked and shouted and Kirk paced and shouted, he had time to regret a great many things.

Suddenly, Jim Kirk made one of his notorious lightning shifts of presentation. He spread his arms expansively and benevolently intoned, "But we've been talking as though there were only two people involved here! What about the *child*, Bones? Is it fair -- is it reasonable -- is it honorable to condemn *her* for her mother's... mistakes?"

Spock gave him a suspicious look, but the Captain had been swept up by his own vision. Gradually, through sheer persistence, he managed to verbally bludgeon Leonard McCoy into acquiescence if not acceptance.

Joanna would give custody of the girl to her father. McCoy could deliver her to Starfleet Neurology; if they could do what they were supposed to do, and she recovered, he could send the child to one of the Federation creches until she was old enough to enter the Academy. That was why the creches had been built -- and they were fine institutions, you could practically guarantee that their graduates would be accepted for Starfleet training. Jim's own nephew, his late brother's son, was living at Creche Epsilon right now, and after he'd gotten over being homesick he really *loved* the place...

Spock was recalling his last conversation with Joanna. If she still resented the fact that her father had sent her away to a boarding school... "First, Joanna McCoy's permission must be secured. She will have to be convinced that this is the best way to protect her daughter."

McCoy, who had not taken much part in the debate for the last few minutes, bared his teeth in something meant for a grin. "Don't expect me to humble myself. Ah'm not gonna beg -- "

Kirk shook his head and smiled sweetly. Spock felt his liver sink as his friend and commanding officer said, "Spock is the best person for this, I think. Spock, you can explain this to her... logically."

He did not go down to the rec room that evening. He did not leave his quarters at all, resisting any impulse toward exercise or entertainment, which might have explained why he slept so badly when he finally retired. By morning, ship's time, logical consideration made evident the fact that it would be wisest to allow as much room for negotiation and adjustment as possible. He must discuss this unpleasant subject as soon as was convenient for Joanna.

Further personal debate went toward a choice of location. Obviously this was not a topic for public discussion, which made the rec room unsuitable. (She did not seem the sort of female to produce an emotional drama for an audience, but even the faintest approach towards a public display would only make a difficult task more arduous.) Calling her to one of the small conference rooms would not only draw the attention of numerous crewmembers occupied in such public areas, but would mean putting a record of their conversation into the *Enterprise's* record files. Nothing could have induced him to conduct so sensitive a dialogue under the eyes of her Hagarite associates -- or of her daughter.

So, when it was, at last, late enough in the "morning" to make a business call, he contacted the section where the Hagar delegation was quartered and requested as formally as possible that Ambassador Joanna McCoy meet him in his personal quarters... alone.

It was over an hour before she finally entered the cabin, by which time Spock had rehearsed and rejected several possible explanatory monologues. Her face was guarded, her eyes wary.

"Christine told me that you and the Captain and -- and Dr. McCoy -- were shut up in conference for a long time yesterday afternoon. She was under the impression that you might have been -- discussing my daughter, talking about our, ah, problem." Her voice trembled very faintly at the end of the sentence, but her emotions were tightly reined.

Spock had not considered Nurse Chapel's presence important; he had not realized that Joanna must have spent a long night awake and troubled, just as he had. Taking refuge in his role as emissary, he managed to stammer his way through a credibly factual and unemotional presentation of Captain Kirk's drastic solution.

Her reaction was both better than he had hoped for, and worse than he had expected. She did not weep, or protest, or cry out: merely made a single sound between a gasp and a moan, and clenched her fists on the table top until her knuckles whitened. But the wave of pain and rage and loss she



emitted was so strong that his head swam and his own muscles locked in sympathy. As she fought silently to bring herself under control, he stared at the ancient Vulcan weapons mounted on the wall behind her. Almost, briefly, he resented Kirk's blithe delegation of this unpleasant task -- but reason reminded him that the Captain, despite his gifts, was not of a temperament to do anything but botch the situation even more thoroughly than he, Spock, had done.

Finally she asked bitterly, "Have you *seen* the Federation creches?"

It did not seem to him a question requiring an answer, and he waited without speaking until she added, "No -- yes -- what choice have I left? Either I watch Tiriana's convulsions get worse and worse, until she dies or turns into a vegetable... or I hand her over to that -- to a man I hate, who'll put her in an institution where she'll be treated like a laboratory animal in a cage."

She paused again, and finished in a tone approaching anger. "But it is certainly a most... *logical* solution, I suppose."

"It was not my solution. It was not... not a way I would have chosen."

She stared at him, confused. He was a bit unnerved himself; apparently her feelings had made more of an impact on his personal control than was acceptable or decent. But he had seen the sort of accommodations provided for wards of the Federation -- he had seen children brought up under such conditions -- and suddenly it was very clear to him that abandoning Tiriana to a school that would systematically and inevitably reduce her present potential to a scale suitable for a life in the Service would be criminal.

It was illogical to waste so creative a mind in a government creche. It was not reasonable to hand over the shaping of such an intelligence to someone as rigid, habit-ridden, and superstitious as the Chief Surgeon. Illogical, therefore non-Vulcan.

He held this flawlessly reasoned conclusion firmly in the forefront of his mind while scraps of Federation law and human literature whirled through his consciousness.

Joanna had the intelligence not to speak, not to question or harangue or debate him. She merely looked at him and waited, her face a mask, her feelings temporarily deadened.

"Tiriana must be a Federation dependent to get the treatment she needs. Her only relation thus qualified is her -- is Dr. McCoy. But one need not be a dependent by blood..."

Something quizzical woke in her eyes as she watched him.

He drew a quick breath and finished, "I could marry you. I could adopt Tiriana. Then she would be eligible for treatment as a dependent of Starfleet."

She swallowed, and stammered, and blushed a fiery red up to the roots of her hair and down into the collar of her shirt. "Mr. Spock, I -- well, I thank you, I certainly *appreciate* your intentions, but... have you considered, logically -- "

Logical consideration was something he did not intend to indulge himself with at the moment. He broke in, "It would be a legal form only. You would not need to -- the question of, of demands upon your, your attention -- "

Inexplicably, she threw back her head and laughed. An ancient proverb of his father's people flashed through his mind: *The hunter does not see the le-matya, but a le-matya sees the le-matya.* Did she... ?

But Joanna stopped as quickly as she had begun, sobering suddenly as she said, "No, Spock, I don't think a telepathic race would exactly manage too well as, ah, rapists. I don't mean to offend you. But -- you would not make such an offer unless it were... tremendously important to you. Why, Mr. Spock? *Why?*"

This, at least, he had an answer for. "I would -- I would *insist* upon a formal adoption. I would ask that Tiriana -- T'Riana -- take my name." (It occurred to him in passing that bestowing a Vulcan clan name upon a human child who would probably be unable to pronounce it might involve difficulties of its own.) "I would like to establish visitation rights, were it possible." He looked her in the eyes and concluded, almost defiantly, "I would want her to be *my* child, also."

She reached out tentatively and touched his hand. He was astonished to discover that he was trembling.



"Well, I'd heard that Vulcans, even male Vulcans, put a great deal of importance in their children."

"It is... logical to try and pass what is important down to another generation. Culture... art... knowledge... such things are all a race or an individual has to distinguish between intelligence and insentience."

She seemed to be searching for something in his face. "I do -- thank you, Spock, for considering my... human emotions. But surely, you could find... if you wanted..." She stopped and cleared her throat.

"My father was a Vulcan," he said. "My mother was a woman of Earth. Interspecies hybrids -- mules -- however vigorous they may appear, are not -- do not..."

"Sterile." There was something... compassion, perhaps... in her whisper. But he winced and withdrew his hand, converting the action as he fumbled with the command ring on his finger.

"I am not cognizant with current human customs regarding betrothal. But surely -- there must be, I think, a ring. Vulcans do not wear jewels for adornment, but this can perhaps be substituted."

He stood, and reached for her hand, and managed to slide the heavy ring onto her finger and to fold her fist shut around it gently. She did not, after a single spasm, resist him.

Slowly, she stood up, pushing the chair back so that she could step away from him. Slowly, still, she reconsidered, and finally moved toward him again. It seemed... logical... that he should put his arms around her: logical, but a little awkward. She responded in kind, somewhat stiffly also.

They stood locked for a long moment before some adjustment of mind and chemistry seemed to flow between them like a current, or the start of a mind-meld. He shifted the position of his arms slightly, and she leaned her head against his chest.

She was not tall and willowy, like the women that James Kirk loved best. But her compact little body had a solidity of flesh and muscle which would serve her long after more fragile beauties had succumbed to time and gravity. In the sunlight -- the strong sunlight and invigorating heat of Vulcan! -- her hair would glint with golden lights. Maturity was slowly giving her a dignity all her own, a beauty deeper and more original than the genetic accident of mere prettiness.

Holding her, he looked back over the past few days and wondered that all his actions had somehow led him to this. The rapid beating of her heart, for some reason not explainable by pure intellect, inspired him with a tenderness he had never felt for a woman before.

"Do all Vulcans smell of peppermint?" she murmured.

"I do not know. I had not thought about it." Suddenly they were both chuckling -- both laughing, louder and louder, as they stood within the circle of each other's arms.





## *The Gentle Healer*

A sudden gleam alerts the eye;  
A warning never misconstrued.  
Solicitous, a comment dry  
And pithy sparks the conflict rude.  
Baited and baiting, set apart,  
The tall, thin figure keeps his role.  
A Vulcan has no feelings, heart  
Or emotions to stir the soul.

With warning given, hardly seen,  
The scalpel flashes down; it rakes,  
Barely breaking skin. Each thin green  
Scar heals swiftly. Retreat? Too late.  
Retort discourteous; a clean  
Smooth lirpal thrust defenestrates.

*--Frankie Jemison*





## Specified Explanation

The fault is as much yours as mine.  
Perhaps 'fault' is not the proper word--  
Flaw. Yes, the flaw is in both of us;  
But yours has a convenient excuse.  
Mine doesn't. I have suffered even as you.  
Perhaps more, for my flaw can only be counted  
As of my own making.

When I was seven and we were bonded  
I was properly awed by the situation.  
You were the one with whom I would share my mind  
And my bed. You were my male half.  
Yin and Yang. The universe would be reflected  
In our combined beings. But at seven  
I thought not consciously of these things;  
I knew only that when you were praised  
I was praised; when you were punished  
I was punished

and so it would have been ever  
Had the feeling been mutual. You came not once  
to my home to engage in polite inquiries,  
To acknowledge publicly my worth to you  
As was right. All of you I knew--save for  
A vague, cool touch in my mind--were the  
Formal, stilted letters that arrived irregularly  
And were obviously a result of parental pressure.  
Sarek always did honor his family's obligations.  
I think perhaps I could have borne  
Your disinterest, but every painful letter  
Screamed that I was an annoyance  
And why didn't I go away?  
You never said these things of course. Perhaps  
You never actively thought them. I was perhaps  
Overly sensitive.  
Are you not shocked at these words applied to a Vulcan?  
Then read them again

and know my flaw  
The one that drove me to dark remote corners  
To feel the strange burning in my eyes  
The alien wetness on my cheeks  
That flamed with culturally inbred shame.







The beginning of the end, I think, came  
When you left for Starfleet Academy.  
When I first heard that you had gone,  
I disbelieved. Surely you would not embark  
Upon a new life without informing  
She-Who-Would-Bear-Your-Offspring!  
I said nothing of the omission--I wished  
You no unnecessary shame--and when your message came  
Six months overdue  
It read like a form application  
(Just fill in the appropriate spaces and  
Affix your signature in the designated area.)  
And then the letters stopped altogether.  
I tried to follow your career as best I could,  
Tried to comprehend your world,  
Until at last I grew weary under the strain  
Of living two lives. I grew to know that  
I did not like the role you had assigned me  
In your life, did not like being useful  
Only so far as that I slaked your body's hunger.

So it was that I decided that if you  
Would not have all of me, that you  
Should have none of me.

That is why I chose your Captain my champion.  
I knew you would defeat him  
And you would live, though apart from me,  
For I could not let you die.  
I did not realize that the human was so dear to you.  
I thought you brought him  
Out of duty--he was your captain, after all--  
And such loyalty is easily reassigned.  
I did not mean to hurt you so, for  
In that moment your hurt was as great as mine  
And revenge was not my motive.  
In that moment, I saw you as you were,  
As you are--and I saw an image of myself.  
But this time there was no dark corner  
So I held my tears and accepted Stonn  
(For though he compares not to you, he is  
Willing to share his life with me  
Such as it is, and it is better than nothing)  
And when you asked me why, I said not  
That you had neglected me disgracefully  
That you had wanted me only because of your bodily needs  
That you had sealed your life away from me

but only

"I did not want to be the consort of a legend"  
And took the flaw all unto myself



To absolve you and condemn myself  
In the eyes of All-Vulcan.

It was my final gift--the only one I had  
Any power to bestow, a tribute to  
What might have been.

--L. Jeanne Powers

## The Challenge

I must be calm. It is not seemly  
that I should allow any hint of excitement  
to show. Yet I am sure if I must wait much longer  
I will burst asunder!  
Truly the gods of my mothers have finally  
decided to smile upon my family again at last;  
for if not so, then why did this exalted and excellent  
woman come to me and say, "I wish not to marry Spock.  
Might I name thee my champion?"  
Such joy! She for whom I would grant all I had,  
for whom I would lay down my life  
though she belonged to another, asking me  
to be her champion.  
How she came to choose me, I do not know--  
for I am not wealthy nor clever nor of high status--  
but I do not question the will of the gods.  
As they ordain, so shall it be.  
And now it is time.  
I am not afraid; I am certain to be the victor.  
She moves slowly, the grace of her mothers in her walk.  
All it takes is the naming and I am ready--  
*No! It cannot be!*

--L. Jeanne Powers



# HUMAN DREAM, VULCAN REALITY

Carol A. Taddeo

*"CAPTAIN'S LOG, STARDATE: 7608.25. The Enterprise has been ordered to planet Dionysus II to pick up a member of a rare animal species just discovered there by Federation Colonizing vessel Orion. The animal, apparently a member of the genus Equus, has been described as a roan-colored mare."*

Kirk punched the 'log off' button and looked up at his first officer. "Well, Spock, any theories on how this horse just suddenly 'appeared' on a planet where all previous surveys indicated a total absence of sentient life?"

Spock stood by his station and looked down at his commanding officer. "None, Captain."

Kirk raised his eyebrows in an unspoken, 'Oh?'

Spock felt compelled to explain further. "There is very little background data available to us--not enough to enable me to formulate any theories, sir."

"You mean, theories other than the most obvious one--that someone transported her there." Kirk smiled, thinking, *At least for once he didn't say, 'Insufficient data, Captain'.*

"Captain, that was a logical deduction. I assumed you wished to know theories for the unusual. However, there is one thing we do know: no ship has been detected in that area between the time of the departure of the survey and the arrival of the Orion."

Spock seated himself and played his fingers over the library computer controls. "Data indicate that planets where animals like the one described live either do not have space flight capability, or confine all animals in a zoo."

"Well, obviously, this one can't be an escapee or have been kidnapped, because Starfleet would have told us that, and just as obviously, we have no way of tracing an animal taken from a wild herd. And *that* means that this horse's origin could stay a secret forever." Kirk's face took on a wry look as he faced forward and settled himself into a more comfortable position. "This should prove to be a very interesting trip," he said thoughtfully, to no one in particular.

Interesting? Perhaps. Uneventful? Definitely. They made the journey to Dionysus II without a hitch. Spock at his sensors quickly located the animal below. He fed the coordinates to the aft cargo transporter room and was soon notified that the animal had been safely beamed aboard.

He turned toward Kirk. "Our cargo is aboard, sir."

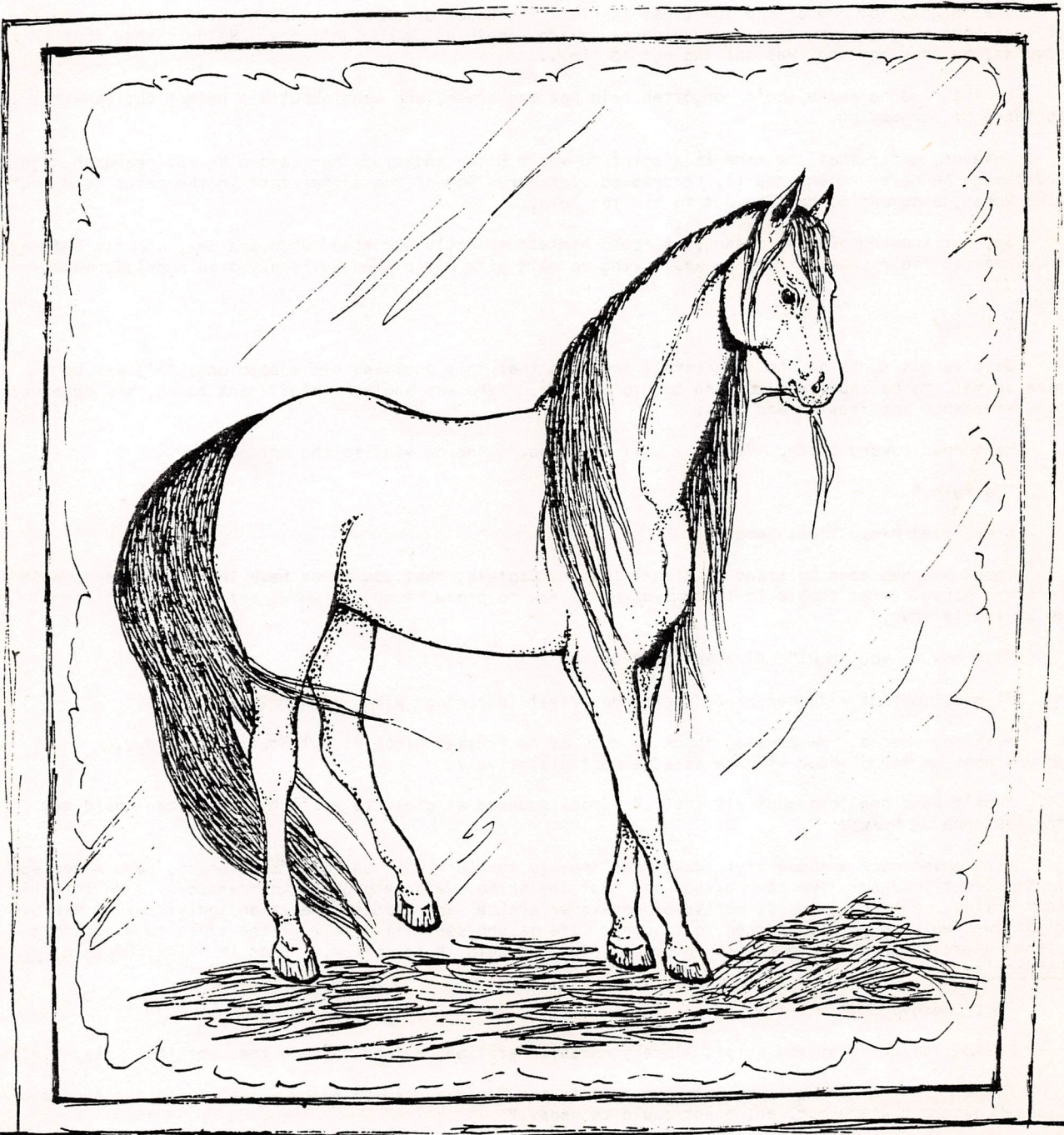
Kirk handed the clipboard back to the female yeoman at his side and replied, "Very good. Mr. Sulu, lay in a course for Starbase Twelve. Ahead warp one."

The smiling helmsman replied, "Aye, sir," as he pressed the sequence of buttons that made the great starship go where her commanding officer willed, as fast as he willed.

Before going off duty that night, Spock decided to look in on their unusual cargo. He had never seen a horse before, except in pictures. This one, though, looked as healthy as the tapes said she should be.

When he arrived, the horse was standing, guarded only by a selective force field, in a specially altered corner of the aft cargo hold. It was eating some hay. But as he stood there watching it, the horse stopped chewing and looked at him. Spock sensed a strongly intelligent aura about this animal, something in the mental field that seemed to surround them as he moved toward it. His hunger for





SHONA JACKSON



knowledge overriding his desire for privacy, he opened his mind, trying to sense what was in the mind of the animal. He touched it, but all he could discover was that the horse thought of herself as D'tin, and that she had been through a recent upheaval in her life, which he assumed was the transporter beam-up.

He didn't know why at the time, but he gave in to the urge to pick up some hay, and fed it to D'tin.

That night, for one of the few times in his life, Spock dreamed. He saw himself walking a multi-colored path through a multicolored universe toward something he couldn't see. He only knew that *someone*, he knew not who, was calling out to him....

By the time he awoke, he'd forgotten he'd had the dream, and went about his normal duties with no sense of foreboding.

However, after that, he made it a point to visit D'tin and study her before he retired each night. And though he never remembered it, he dreamed...of her. Not of the animal form in the cargo hold, but of a woman, a humanoid, calling out to him for help.

So, not knowing his own dreams, he found himself slightly surprised when one day, shortly before they reached their destination, he was trying to meld with D'tin when he received an agonized mental cry.

*Help me!*

Despite his surprise, he immediately realized that this verified his suspicions; this was no mere animal, to be shuttled from one zoo to another. Here was another intelligent being, who deserved her own chance for freedom and life.

He turned toward D'tin. "Yes. I will help you." And he went to the bridge.

"Captain."

Kirk faced him. "Yes, Spock?"

Spock stepped down to stand to Kirk's left. "Captain, the...*guest* we have in the aft cargo hold is not a horse. I am unable to inform you as to how to prove it objectively, but I know that what I am saying is true."

"But how do you know?" Kirk was puzzled.

"I made contact with her mind, and found myself in contact with another intelligence."

Kirk considered. He trusted Spock as much as he trusted himself, but Starfleet said.... "What do you want me to do about it?" he asked almost plaintively.

"Don't send her into captivity, sir." Spock sounded as close to emotion as a Vulcan could get in the presence of humans.

Kirk gave Spock a thoughtful look, then finally turned toward Uhura. "Lieutenant, send a message to Starfleet Command: 'We have discovered that the animal we were ordered to transport is an intelligent entity. Per the Prime Directive of non-interference, and because she is an individual in her own right, we feel she should be free to live her life as she sees fit. We will therefore take her to a planet where she can live her life in peace. Further details to follow.' Sign it 'Kirk, Captain, USS Enterprise.'"

"Mr. Chekov."

Chekov, standing at the ship's library computer station, turned to face the captain. "Yes, sir?"

"I believe that there is an asteroid belt in the Draco system up ahead. See if you can find a Class-M asteroid where our, ah, guest could be happy."

"Yes, sir." Chekov bent over the scanner.

"When you've found it, feed the coordinates to the aft cargo transporter room."

Lieutenant Uhura frowned slightly. "But Captain, shouldn't we wait for Starfleet's confirmation?"



Kirk shook his head, grinning boyishly at her. "If we present them with a *fait accompli*, they won't be able to do much more than squawk a bit. If we wait for them to come to the proper decision, we could wait a long time!"

Kirk's grin was infectious. Chekov too was smiling as he adjusted the scanner controls. "Yes, sir!"

"Spock, come with me." Kirk rose. "Mr. Scott, you have the conn."

A few minutes later, they were in the aft cargo hold, watching while D'tin was placed on the cargo transporter. Long moments passed before Chekov's voice came over the intercom with a set of coordinates. "There are intelligent life forms there already, Captain, but they're harmless vegetarians."

Kirk frowned. "If that's the best you can find, I guess it will have to do. Beats life in a zoo, anyway, right, Spock?"

As the transporter officer was about to activate the transporter, Spock stepped onto the pads beside D'tin. He said, "She may not fully comprehend her new environment, or her change in status. I will go with her in the event that she might need my help."

Kirk moved as if to join him, but it was too late. The officer energized; two more life forms appeared on the asteroid below.

Before Spock could comprehend what was happening, D'tin collapsed. A great wind arose as if from nowhere, a wind so strong that it knocked Spock off his feet. It kept him from clearly seeing the change taking place in the form of D'tin. Where there had been a horse, a beautiful young female was emerging, with humanoid features, golden hair, and pale, white skin. She was draped from shoulders to feet in dark green velvet.

The wind died, as suddenly as it had risen. The changeling spoke. "Spock."

Spock arose, curiosity written in every lineament of his face. "Who--what--are you?"

"I think you know." The female was amused.

It took Spock a moment to answer quietly, "D'tin. What caused you to change forms?" Spock's voice was unusually gentle.

"You did." The vision of loveliness approached, causing Spock to wonder. But he remained still, nonetheless.

"How?"

The logical portion of his mind heard her telling him through mind touch how she had detected a defect in the mental block placed on her. She could, with great effort, direct her thoughts at one individual whose brain waves were compatible to hers. Another, more human, less logical part of him heard something of a more personal nature. "By your kindness to me, you have freed me from the spell laid upon me by a--a wicked being. For that, I thank you." She drew nearer and kissed him. "And now I must go."

He remembered the forbidden fairy tales he'd taken from his mother's collection to read in secret and delight. Enchantment....

"Go? Will you not stay here?" He nodded his head toward the leafy green forest surrounding the clearing in which they stood.

Her point of vision drifted downward. "I can't. I must return home to my own universe, to help free my people from the grip of the evil being."

"Then I must come, too!" Spock shouted, knowing full well the consequences of what he'd said.

Her calm, golden eyes met his agitated brown ones. Tenderly, she said, "You cannot. Though I have learned that I love you, I will not allow you to sacrifice yourself and your career for me." She drew near and kissed him again.

As she backed away, she added, "Farewell, my love."

Spock stepped toward her, but she slowly faded from his sight, melting like mist, as he knelt on the spot where she'd stood. He clutched the grass, still depressed from her footprints, and quiet tears crawled down his cheeks.



"Goodbye, my love," he whispered softly.

A red-alert klaxon sounded, waking the first officer. He paused for a brief moment to wonder why the pillow beneath his cheek was wet, before he rose and answered the call he had pledged his life to.





# SARPEIDON APOGEE

JOCELYN FEASTER

Immersed in warm waters near the subterranean hot spring, Zarabeth considered the state of her existence. It was almost two months since the loneliness had ended. Much had changed for her. Now she had a man, and though at times his face clouded-in remembering the oft-mentioned one, Kirk, and he who died that first day, McCoy-LinggSpock was warm, passionate and giving.

There was joy again in living, and purpose. The greenhouse flourished and vegetables were present at each meal. Together, they'd sculpted a cauldron of sorts and stews became the main staple. Even the daily hunt became an adventure instead of mere necessity. Their lives had attained the warm, golden serenity of shared happiness...a simplicity...

Now, however, something was wrong. Something was very wrong. LinggSpock had seemed pale, weak in the days past. And the night before, she'd wakened to find him making tiny moaning sounds, his body curled a little away from hers, sweat-soaked and shivering. She'd held him, warming far into the night, and until peace of sleep returned with the morning...

Zarabeth frowned briefly at her reflection in the waters lapping about her. Now he was gone, had disappeared from the alcove. To hunt...? Then perhaps he was better--and perhaps not. She would wait...a while.

\*

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\*

In contrast to the ferocity of the blizzard raging about him it was strangely quiet inside LinggSpock's head. Calm. Thoughts floated gently thru the Vulcan's mind. He could see McCoy on the fur bed: again pale, hoarse, blind. So...long ago, it seemed. A strange memory, like a scene from some tragic theatre:

*McCoy's lungs are ice-smeared and the tricorder readings are very bad, they promise he will die here in this land of ice-a frozen sepulcher... His wheezings have become more pronounced now, irregular.*

*Seated nearby, Spock feels silent heartbreak etching itself on his face. He never knew there could be an agony this special, this specific, this intense. Eyes closed, he waits for an end.*

*McCoy awakens, discovers that he cannot see and goes softly still. After a moment he senses someone in the room and croaks weakly, "Spock?"*

*Spock responds immediately, briefly touching him, "I'm here, doctor."*

*McCoy sighs, relaxes, breathes a bit easier. "You sound fine anyway...and we're warm here." He pauses, possibly awaiting the Vulcan's usual natty rejoinder, but there is none, this time.*

*"Tell me, Spock. And not just my eyes, how bad am I?"*

*Spock dodges the question, murmurs: "You should conserve your strength," and rearranges the furs, thinking: 'At least now he has no pain.'*

*McCoy stiffens. Spock would never be evasive, unless... "I'm that bad, eh?"*

*"The readings..." Spock begins, then stops, looks away, "Never mind the readings." 'I do not want to lose you, Leonard.'*

*McCoy quirks an eyebrow but lies quiet, accepting. "S'okay...I know, Spock, I didn't think we'd*



git along at first...glad I was wrong."

Spock shakes his head. "Prolonged speaking will only aggravate the condition," he says. "Please, rest my friend."

McCoy thumps the side of the bed. "No. Lemme, lemme talk now... Nothin' wrong with doin' a bit'o reminiscin... Hey now, do Vulcans reminisce? Anyways-" He begins a sudden, uncontrollable coughing. Seiftly, supporting McCoy's head with one hand, Spock administers an injection with the other. But it is some moments before the stricken human regains his wind.

"Thanks... Member that... that ole gladiator planet, Spock?" Your savin me back there? And Zeon? Hoo! I swear, you were the funniest lookin nazi I'd ever seen!" He chuckles over the memory, then sobers. "But... when you took that flintlock in the side... I prayed that you would live..."

Trying to focus milky eyes, McCoy reaches out for Spock, who leans closer. He is earnest now. His face white, his voice a dry, rasping sound: "Listen t'me. If you... have t'stay here, make th' best of it... That girl in there, she wants you. You'll be ok... An don't worry bout Jim, he's a survivor. He'll make it, always has... You, you be ok. Do that... for me-" His voice abruptly fades, his body seeming to crumple.

"McCoy!" Spock jerks as if electrified, shakes him, feels for a heartbeat, almost frantic. "LEONARD MCCOY!!!" "I need you to live!"

McCoy lsowly grips Spock's hand in his own. He seems calm, and murmurs reassuringly, "S'kay." He smiles gently. "Y'know... I love you...Spock-" And the room is still.

Zarabeth makes a silent appearance in the archway. Spock does not notice as he slowly covers the body and stands with bowed head whispering: "And peace, to you from whom I learned... dear doctor..." Until he feels her slender hand press his shaking shoulders.

A tragic play...with fleeting instants from a life now past. Yes, it seemed that way, especially now that he'd truly accepted all death... But with the memory came pain, terribly real pain, and for the first time LinggSpock allowed that feeling to overtake him completely.

Uncontrollably, knowing he would freeze-must freeze-LinggSpock began to cry, sobbing. He hurt, it had been building for weeks now but he just couldn't care anymore. He was truly alone in the Universe. For without Kirk and McCoy, there was nothing...and no amount of pretense would change that. Nor some faint logic alter the fact that this was his essence, what he was.

Pounding a frozen shelf, the cold wind biting his flesh, LinggSpock the man-the child-sank slowly to his knees...

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At Federation Central Legal Center, thrice-decorated Commodore J.L. Stone-previously of Star-Base #11-was dictating a report into his executive recording computer: "...from which he escaped through the help of an informed local and returned to the 'Library,' where it was learned that if a time traveller were not previously prepared for his destination by a device identified as the "Atavacron", said traveller would soon die unless returned to the original embarcation point...

"Though several attempts were made, contact was never reestablished with either the Commander or the Doctor...

"Captain Kirk requests at this time both a brief leave of absence for himself, and a commendation for Lieutenant-Commander Montgomery Scott who, in an effort to assist in retrieval of all three officers, waited until the last possible moment before transporting Kirk aboard and warping the Enterprise safely away from the expanding nova...

"The Captain's request for leave is hereby granted. The commendation for Engineer Scott is under consideration. As to the matter of the loss of Commander Spock and Medical Officer McCoy, condolences are to be dispatched immediately to all respective parties...notations to be signed: STONE, J.L., COMMODORE, Federation Legal Center."

The machine beeped, signalling assent. Stone flicked off the audio circuit, slowly closed and sealed the report folder. He sighed, fingers absently tracing the double-sunburst insignia on his chest. "We always seem to lose the best..."



Worried now, Zarabeth watched the bright, chill sun begin it's descent. Then turning, she gathered her cloak and spear and started out at a swift, jogging pace. Night always came quickly, and there were predators.

By the time she found him the early storm had returned intensified. He was huddled 'neath an ice-cliff, still.

She shook him, shouting above the roaring air, "Spock! LinggSpock my darling what is it?"

He didn't respond. All his muscles felt locked and his body was folded in on itself, small. He seemed conscious, aware, but somehow he'd shut everything out, even her. She could not move him and he would not get up.

Dusk slid down the sky, settling bitter on wings of ice. From somewhere close, a xibias-snchzata screamed its cry of hunger...Zarabeth hefted the spear. This was her man. She would not leave him, and would rather die than return to that loneliness-hell... She waited. The cold winds howled as darkness swallowed the pair.

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At the StarBase R & R Center on Neesha-3, James T. Kirk was found collapsed in his cabins.





# A Warrior's Death

Ingrid Cross

*"But he lay like a warrior taking his rest,  
With his martial cloak around him."  
- Charles Wolfe*

Spock's head dropped forward and snapped back as he came out of a light, troubled doze. Amazed that he had fallen asleep (although it had been nearly four days since he had slept last), he restrained himself from jumping up and running into the next room. He reminded himself again that Dr. McCoy had promised to call him if there was any change in the captain's condition.

He stood and straightened his tunic, glancing at the chronometer on McCoy's desk. Third shift. He should be on the bridge, but something held him back. He had to check on Jim first.

Schooling his features and his errant mind, he went into the adjoining intensive care room which held only one bed. Spock glanced at the readings on the mediscan indicators and sighed inside. No change. To have it confirmed yet again sent another searing barb into his soul.

The lighting in this room was dim, casting Jim Kirk's face into shadow. The atmosphere had changed from a feeling of waiting to one of impending doom. The feeling in here was cold and spoke of approaching death. Spock shook his head to negate the sensation, pushing it aside. This was illogical: how could the very air portend death?

A closer search revealed the chief medical officer, hunched in a chair close to the bed. The Vulcan marvelled that McCoy still remained in this room. His very presence seemed to be a fight against what was inevitable. Spock knew he would never say it, though. At this point, it would seem an offense rather than solicitude.

As Spock quietly moved closer, McCoy started awake. The blue eyes, rimmed with red, focused quickly and glanced at the body on the bed. He, too, read the diagnosis and stood wearily.

"No change," McCoy said softly in greeting. Spock wondered for perhaps the fiftieth time why McCoy persisted in talking softly in here. Sound level would make no difference to the comatose captain. He squelched the thought; this was another thing he would not speak of.

Jim Kirk seemed to be sleeping peacefully. Yet appearances in this case were deceiving. Spock remembered vividly four days ago when they had beamed the captain aboard the Enterprise, battered beyond imagination, nearly dead from loss of blood. Then another memory flashed into his mind: Kirk, an hour before he beamed down to the "diplomatic" meeting with the Klingons, saying firmly, "There is no need for you to go with me, Spock. I can take care of myself. Besides, they've given their word that no harm will come to our landing party. This is supposed to be a treaty signing, remember?"

Spock had argued with him. Again. As usual. "It does not necessarily mean they will honor their word."

The hazel eyes had smiled at him, and the golden aura which always seemed to surround his friend had brightened. "Star Fleet set up elaborate security systems. Spock, you sound like a mother hen." Then he had beamed to the surface, where treachery and deceit awaited all five Enterprise crewmembers. Jim Kirk had been the only survivor. If this could be called survival.

McCoy finished his examination and turned away for a moment. Spock didn't speak, knowing that to interrupt the doctor's private thoughts would embarrass McCoy. Finally, McCoy faced him again.



"His condition, Doctor?"

McCoy shook his head. "Not good. No change." The broad shoulders slumped. "Dammit all!" he swore.

The time had come. There could be no more hesitation on his part. Spock stepped forward and touched McCoy's elbow. "Come with me," he said gently, trying to convey more than he could say with the touch. McCoy looked up, bewildered, and gave in without a second thought. To Christine Chapel, hovering nearby, he said, "stay with him, Chris." She nodded at her superior, sympathy evident in her look.

McCoy followed Spock into his office and sat behind his desk. The first officer took the other chair in the room.

McCoy rubbed at his eyes and turned the desk lamp away from his face. It was obvious to Spock that the doctor was exhausted beyond control; the man should have been sleeping a little during the four day vigil, yet when Chapel had suggested the idea, he snapped at her. Spock understood McCoy's emotions, although he could not bring himself to say that. To admit any emotion lately would have been to give in to the inevitable. Until now, McCoy had not really faced the obvious; Spock knew that he would have to make the human understand some very basic facts now. Yet he hesitated, wishing for a moment that someone else had the courage to do this. But truthfully, Spock knew that he would have to be the one. No one else aboard the Enterprise would have dared to approach McCoy with this message.

"Well, what d'ya want, Spock?" McCoy demanded. "I have work to do. I have to take care of Jim."

Painfully, Spock tried to make McCoy understand. "Jim will still be there, Doctor. It is necessary that we talk. Here, alone." He chose his next words carefully.

"Jim's health has been failing steadily for the past four days. You yourself have said there is no chance for a major improvement. What do you propose to do now?" The words, finally spoken and between them, sounded harsh. There was no way he could recall them, even if he had so desired.

McCoy's eyes spat fire at him. "What the hell do you mean, what do I want to do now?"

Spock leaned forward. "You will have to make a decision. What will you do about Jim?" he repeated, feeling ruthless.

A hand slammed down violently, the sound reverberating through the small room. "Damn it, Spock! I'm gonna keep monitorin' him! What else can I do?"

Spock kept his voice level. "You could let him go." It was a flat statement. But Spock could feel the price the words had exacted from him; somewhere inside he felt hollow, empty.

McCoy's mouth dropped open in amazement. "Do you know what you're sayin', Spock?" He whispered, the color draining from his haggard features.

The words like an iron fist thrust into Spock's stomach. He managed to avoid flinching and savagely tried to bring his emotions under control. He merely nodded, not certain he could trust his voice.

"You're talking murder, Mister! You can sit there and calmly discuss something like this?" McCoy stood, looking at Spock as though he thought the Vulcan had finally lost his mind. "Well, if you're ready to give up, fine. I'm not. Excuse me." In one fluid motion, the doctor stood and started for the door. Spock's hand whipped out and took hold of the doctor's arm. McCoy looked down at the restraining hand and back up at Spock, who remained still.

"Sit down."

McCoy made a movement as though he would ignore the demand, took a look at the Vulcan's eyes and reconsidered. He sat down again.

"You have lost your objectivity, Doctor." When McCoy opened his mouth to retort, Spock quickly continued. "No, let me finish. I, too, have been guilty of not thinking about this rationally. Do not look so amazed. We have been too close to the matter; we have not treated this as we must. To us, we see only James Kirk, not the face of a patient who lingers on, suffering needlessly.







"Think, Doctor. If that was any other person out there, would you continue to sustain life where consciousness is no longer present?"

McCoy considered the question, and Spock realized the critical point had been reached. The first one, anyway. Then he shook his head. "I'd do the same thing," McCoy said stubbornly. "I'd keep working until there was no hope left for the patient."

"We are at that point, McCoy. Yesterday you told me Jim's systems are weakening, that his general condition is deteriorating. What is his condition now?"

"Critical. His lungs are weakening farther now, and I'll have to put him on the respirator shortly," McCoy said wearily. "I can't control the fever any more, his pulse is weak and irregular, and the kidney transplant is being rejected by his body."

The truth had been spoken aloud. There could be no turning back. *Forgive me, my friend*, Spock thought sadly. *I must do what I think best*. "And the brain activity?"

The doctor shrugged. "From all indications, his mind is active. Brain scans reveal weak signals, but he's alive. You know that under these circumstances there's nothing I can do!" The words, though uttered quietly, were nearly a scream to Spock's sensitive ears.

"Perhaps not legally," Spock agreed reluctantly. "But the K-2 indicator shows extreme pain, in the 90% range. If the captain is aware of what is happening to him---which I seriously doubt---what is he experiencing?" He waited for an answer which was not forthcoming. "He is in agony, Doctor." Spock spoke deliberately, slowly, aware that his words were like a knife turning slowly in McCoy's soul. "We have a moral obligation here. What would Jim Kirk be like if he regained consciousness today, now?"

"You know as well as I do what a sustained fever at that level would do to the brain, Spock!"

The Vulcan prepared himself mentally for another tirade. "Doctor?"

"He'd be a mindless vegetable," McCoy whispered. His head dropped to his arms which lay on the desk top. Spock was worried. Had he pushed McCoy too far? Then he realized that the gesture had signalled exhaustion, nothing more. When McCoy looked up again, his eyes were damp, but his voice was steady. "He'd be a vegetable."

Spock nodded slowly. The doctor was facing what Spock had come to two days earlier. He pushed forward doggedly. "That is not the James Kirk we both knew," he said, aware of the verb tense he had used. "James Kirk, the captain of this ship, died shortly after he was beamed aboard the Enterprise four days ago. And that brings us to the decision."

His heart was doing somersaults for the first time in a long time. He tried to control his breathing, but it seemed as though every breath he took dragged reluctantly into his lungs. "Jim would not wish to be kept alive, in such constant agony, for so long, Leonard. You must realize that."

"I can't," McCoy said brokenly. "I can't just walk in there and stop the machinery. That's my friend lying on that bed."

Spock tried to think of the correct words. "It would be an act of friendship to release him from this pain." For the first time, he looked away, refusing to meet McCoy's eyes. "I could...do this for you, but I cannot." Horrified at himself, he knew he was a coward. It would seem to McCoy that Spock was backing away from this ultimate decision. Yet as he looked at his hands, he knew he would not not perform this last rite for his friend. Could not.

Yet McCoy remained calm, the blue eyes softening suddenly. And Spock knew that the doctor did not hold the words against him. Leonard McCoy understood him. Spock looked down again at the floor, overwhelmed by the thought that this man---this human who took pleasure, it seemed, in prodding him and pushing him until he nearly reached the point of anger---cared and understood so completely. He was grateful, but could not find the words.

There was a slight rustling in the room and McCoy suddenly appeared beside Spock's chair. "All right. It's all right. I can handle this," he spoke gently. Then a hand squeezed his shoulder briefly before the doors opened and shut again.

Spock stood shakily and left the room quickly. Christine and McCoy were conferring in one corner of the small intensive care area, and Spock forced himself to go over and stand beside Kirk's body.



*Jim, I shall miss you.* The admission startled him; although he had accepted the inevitability of one day being separated from his friend, when the moment had presented itself, he could think of no other words of farewell. Memories flashed in rapid succession through his mind: the times of laughter, sorrow, quiet solitude in the presence of someone who understood him and accepted him for what he was. To think that the one person who had felt this for him would be gone forever hurt unbearably. He reached out and touched a hand growing colder by the minute and lightly ran his fingers across the knuckles. Then he turned away, afraid that he would break down and give way to the maelstrom of emotions inside.

As he moved away from the bed, away from the hushed sounds of a heartbeat pounding out from the diagnostic panel, he heard McCoy move to take his place. Spock glanced in the corner and saw Christine standing there silently, tears running down her cheeks. Her lips moved soundlessly, and Spock realized that she was praying. Her agony and pain were palpable forces in the small room and he inhaled carefully, forcing himself to turn toward Jim again.

McCoy held a syringe in one hand; with the other, he reached out and brushed the lock of hair aside that always fell over Jim's eyebrow. The simple gesture created a pressure in Spock's chest more intense than anything else he had experienced in his life.

*McCoy is hurting, in pain, and there is nothing I can do. I call him friend, yet our friendship is rooted in dissension. What can I do to help him?* he thought helplessly, watching as two tears slowly trickled down the physician's face. *My mother would have me go and comfort Leonard. Father would...what would he do?* The betraying question slipped away as he watched McCoy's hand come up to Kirk's exposed arm and push the syringe in. It seemed as though time stood still and expanded at once. Then the heartbeats slowed down inexorably, beating once every five, ten and then fifteen seconds ...until there was no sound in the room except Christine's smothered sobs.

McCoy moved first, taking the light coverlet and pulling it up over Jim Kirk's face. He hesitated a moment, then turned to face Spock. Tears ran unchecked down his face still, but it was the blue eyes that caught Spock's attention.

"You did all you could for him, Leonard," Spock said quietly, his voice catching slightly at the end. "He would have asked no more than that."

There was little response, except for a tic that appeared over McCoy's left eye. Then the man stumbled past Spock into his office. Spock waited a moment, wondering what he should do. He took one last look at the still figure hidden by the blanket, then turned on his heel and headed after McCoy. The living had to go on. It was an empty phrase now, with little meaning beyond the fact that Spock ached somewhere deep inside. New bridges had to be built; now was the time to start.

The door opened quietly and for once, Spock refused to barricade himself against the pain waiting for him. He spoke to the figure slumped against the wall, shoulders shaking, no sound emanating from McCoy.

"I grieve with thee, Leonard." It was all he could say and finally, for the first time in years, Spock gave in to the human half of his mind and allowed himself to cry.





# Visions

Artwork ~

Marty Siegrist

Interpretations ~

Ingrid Cross

Ginna LaCroix

Cheryl Rice

Laurie Shanahan



# Omens

Laurie Shanahan

It had been a long time since Spock had taken shore leave. Generally, he didn't need it, but when Christopher Pike stepped onto the transporter and spoken his good-byes to all assembled, Spock knew he would want time for himself. Shore leave was the only stop they would make before getting back to Earth to pick up the new Captain and have minor repairs done on the ship. Number One, who would also be transferred, had passively accepted his request for shore leave, and had granted it without question. Then she'd handed him the orders that made him second-in-command of the Enterprise, and told him his Commander's rank would become available as soon as the paperwork was done.

Spock returned to his room and made some minor preparations for his shore leave. Harp in hand, he reported to the Transporter room for beam down.

Once in the busy, sprawling port city, Spock hired a ground car to take him to the country. At the border of a world park, he paid the driver, and then began his hike inward. For several hours, until the sun set, he continued. With the sky a pastel red, he found a place to stay. The cave was rocky, isolated, and fairly protected from the elements. Spock ate a quiet meal, unrolled a blanket, and stretched out for the night.

The next morning's dawn found him already awake. He sat at the mouth of the cave, watching the sun rise. When the sun had heaved the last of itself over the rim of the horizon, Spock picked up his harp, and began to play, softly. A Vulcan harp is not merely a musical instrument; it is also a tool used in meditation. The soft sound brought Spock into a light trance. He allowed himself to become introspective; to carefully examine his ideas about the present situation. A calmness washed over him. Relaxed, he allowed his mind to drift at a deeper level. Repressed thoughts and questions came to the surface of his consciousness: how his parents were, whether or not his new command position would entail much more responsibility, if he would like the new captain.

He'd been given the man's name, James T. Kirk. He allowed his mind to probe his feelings on the subject. In the privacy of himself, he admitted he at least had opinions on things such as this. He concentrated more deeply, analyzing his feelings about Pike and what he knew about Kirk. Suddenly, it seemed as if he weren't in the cave any longer. He saw himself on Earth, in an Admiral's office. He seemed to be looking down on the scene below from a vantage point near the ceiling. Across from the Admiral was a young man, talking animatedly to the older man behind the desk. Sound came shortly after the scene solidified.

*"Yes, Kirk," the Admiral was saying. "These are your orders. You know of the Enterprise?"*

*"Captain Pike's command? She's a good ship. Is Number One being transferred?"*

*"No. Well, yes, but actually, it's Pike we want you to replace. Congratulations, Captain."*

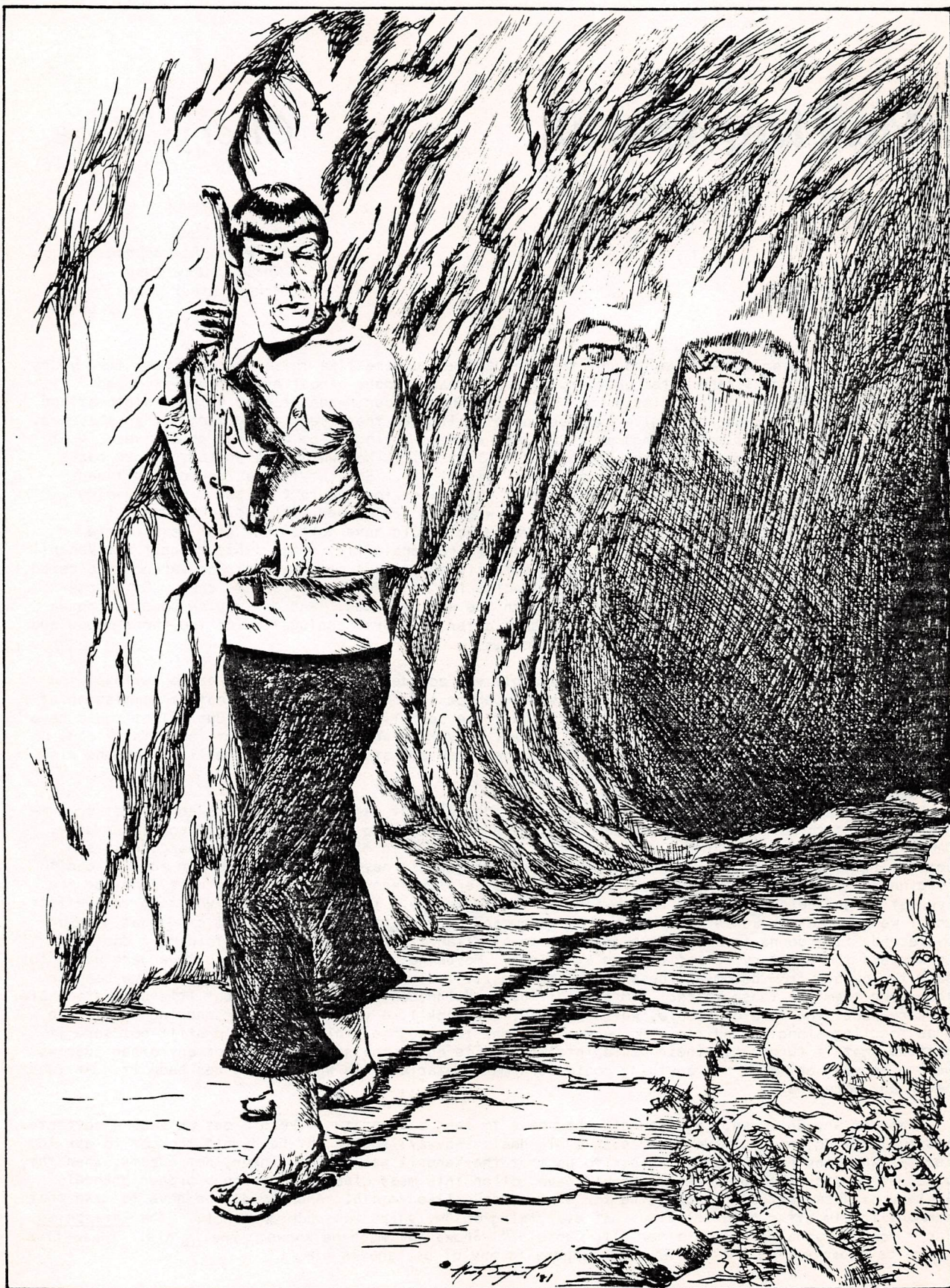
The scene began to fade for Spock. Kirk was looking both determined and pleased, and Spock heard him say, "I'll do my best to make her as good or better a ship than she was before."

Spock came back to the reality of the cave with startling suddenness. He was breathing rapidly, and had slumped into a prone position. He sat up, checking to be sure his harp wasn't damaged.

Could he have seen a real image? He knew it was possible, but only for those who knew each other well, and only when the trance was deep. But he had never met Kirk, and the meditation was never meant to be anything so powerful. Was this a good or bad omen? Was it a warning? As first impressions went, he'd like the man, but that feeling was also based on what he'd read about him. Shaken, Spock stood, and went to the mouth of the cave. He was astonished to discover it was evening. The sun had just set, and the stars leaped out of the night sky. The thought came that he had hallucinated the whole thing, but he dismissed it, somehow knowing it was real. Would this Kirk have a special bond with him? The idea was both frightening and exhilarating. Tired, he ate a simple meal and slept.

The next morning he collected his few things together and readied himself for the return to the ship. His shore leave would be over in a few hours. He slung his light carry sack over his right shoulder, and picked up the harp. At the mouth of the cave, he paused, and strummed the first few notes of the meditation cycle. He saw Kirk's face again, framed between the mouth of the cave and the rocks along the side. Reassured, somehow, by the mixture of integrity, determination and passion he read on it, he walked away toward the city, feeling almost eager toward what the future might bring.







# Making Plans

Cheryl Rice

*Take my hand  
Life is what happens to you  
While you're busy  
Making other plans*

- J. Lennon

MCCOY: Who ever would have thought that the end would come like this? After almost five years of gettin' out of one scrape after another...one near catastrophe almost every time we looked around. Now to end up in this little backwater place havin' our hands slapped by some diplomat and having to explain over and over/give excuses so we don't make these people any madder than they are. It isn't fair...not that most things are. But all we were trying to do was save some lives. What was that saying? "No good deed goes unpunished." That's it. Now we have Starfleet on our backs along with their precious diplomatic corps. Not fair at all. So what if the Zerkees don't want anything more to do with the Federation 'cause of this; what loss would they be? I keep seeing Jim trying to explain all of this to the head Zerk or whatever his proper title is. He took full responsibility for the delay in our arrival. Maybe we should have gotten our stories a little straighter before we each testified. I said I'd take responsibility since I had thought the Vendrii showed in their tests that they were as intellectually close to humans as their appearance indicated. Once that bit of news got out, anyone would expect a lot of resentment from the crew. Of course it still doesn't explain such severe trouble with the warp engines. And on impulse power alone we just couldn't get here any sooner than three days after the first conjugation of the three moons and the Zerkees didn't have any use for them any more.

I'm sure Seligsen believed the engine trouble was accidental about as much as he believed the story about how an unscheduled overhaul of the subspace radio systems put them out of commission at the same time. Not that I blame him...Uhura isn't the best liar in creation. But 'Fleet could have spared a little energy worrying about us...for all they knew when we were out of touch that long, we could have been in some serious trouble. Maybe they are starting to believe like everyone else that Jim can get out of any scrape...even this one.

Wish Spock would quit lookin' out of that window without darkening the glass any. That bright-fog glare has to be hard on even Vulcan eyes. Wish he'd talk to me. This room is so damn stuffy. Damp and hot at the same time. Humid, sort of like Georgia in mid-summer. Gonna be good to see it again...if we ever get out of here. Jim and Seligsen should have been along an hour ago. I can't imagine he'll try to put any kind of mark on Jim's service record. Not with all he's done for the Federation and being kicked up to the Admiralty any day now. Though I guess it won't go into effect until we get back to Earth and he turns over command of the Enterprise. I don't care what goes on my record. I'm gonna be so glad to get back to civilian life. Spock's always told me I don't understand the military way of looking at things. Maybe he's right if it turns out we were wrong to save ten people from becoming these creatures' festival dinners. If it's wrong, then I've been on the wrong team all these years. I'm probably being "ethnocentric" as charged but it's understandable to care about the fate of people, well "beings", who look like you. I keep remembering the little ones toddling along behind their mothers. No lambs to slaughter this time. I'm still not sure it matters that it turned out their basic intelligence is about the same as sheep or any other species we use as meat animals. If anything could turn me vegetarian this whole thing has been it. At least never any more veal.

Wonder why Seligsen...and why did they have to send a youngster like him out on such a delicate mission? Being an Intuitive isn't such a big deal. Anyway, wonder why he hasn't thought to ask the Zerkees why they hadn't made it clear to us that the Vendrii were to be dinner, not guests, when they asked us to pick them up. Then we could have gotten this mess cleared up through proper channels instead of just sort of disappearing for sixteen days like we did. And why did he have to make that comment to Jim after he'd insisted that everything on "my ship" was under control. "The Enterprise isn't your personal property after all, Captain." Shows how much he knows. She is his. These five years have proven it. No matter what happens to any of us, she is his.







What can be taking so long? This stone bench is the most uncomfortable thing to sit on ever constructed. When I get settled on Earth the first thing I'm gonna do is get a house with a lot of comfortable furniture. And see all my friends. Wonder how much they've changed after all these years. Wonder how much I have. Wonder what Spock's thinking about. Five years and I'm as far from understanding him as ever. And I'm running out of chances.

SPOCK: Why does the good Doctor insist on sitting on that bench when it is clear he is made most uncomfortable on it? Now that I have adjusted the polarization on this window...there is still nothing to see. Why must he wait down here for the Captain? One would think there were something of use he could be doing on the Enterprise.

This is quite a substandard place. The walls are put together with total disregard for the correct principles of stone masonry. The windowframe is full of splinters. It will be a relief to return to the honest workmanship of Vulcan ways. To the calm logic and mental disciplines. Away from human and other alien disorder. That is what I told Jim. It was not any kind of excuse for my disapproval of the projected use of the Vendrii as feast-meat. It simply was not logical. Whatever the exact amount of self-awareness they have, they do have right to live out full lives. It was not logical that they be butchered to satisfy some barbaric blood-lust of these ambulatory poached eggs...as one of the crew put it. I clearly explained my reasons for thinking delivering them was wrong to the captain and I will never understand why the slogan "Even Spock says it isn't logical" became some sort of a rallying cry. As I'm told it did. I also will never understand how the warp drive could have been so effectively sabotaged, even though it will never be proven officially. I have my suspicions, though. And I think they became more than that when Mr. Scott so definitely turned down my offer of assistance in effecting repairs. And right then the captain did remind me of my preparations for the Kolinahr rituals so I did not have the opportunity to ask again.

The captain and the others have been discussing the situation for two-point-three standard hours now. Seligsen is no fool for his age...hard to believe he is only ten months older than Jim. Diplomats are very concerned with the Prime Directive. If all this can be shown to have interfered with the Zerkees' religion we may all be in a certain amount of trouble. Since it will be impossible for anyone to ever prove any active participation in causing the Enterprise's late arrival by the crew...the relevant computer tapes having been so fortuitously erased by chance...that is the only problem I am able to foresee. But in right the Prime Directive should work both ways. We should not be required to act in ways which are in conflict with our beliefs and morals. "Our". Human beliefs, I should say. To worry about this delay is not a logical act. So doing cannot change the outcome. I have been more affected by my long contact with these emotional beings even though I still do not understand their ways of thought. It is far past time I returned to my home.

There...I can hear footsteps in the corridor outside. Now we can see how we will be officially ending the final assignment of our five-year mission.

KIRK: So Bones and Spock waited for me down here. Should have expected it, I guess. Have to keep up a united front against all comers. Especially the Zerkees. They really are an unattractive group. I don't know if it's their little wings where there shouldn't be any, or their total disregard for anyone else's point of view. If they weren't here right on the new freight lanes I'd say let the Klingons have them. Well, at least we saved ten innocents...for what I don't know. Someone will have to decide what to do with them. Funny how they can look so human and not be.

Maybe I'm being too hard on the Zerkees. Seligsen thinks so. He's going to go far in his career. Wonder if being an Intuitive helps. Most of them aren't exactly telepathic, but they are good at understanding why people behave like they do. I'm still not sure how he managed to soothe them so well. His promising to look into the possible delivery of more Vendrii for the next conjugation feast was a stroke of genius considering it won't happen for over three hundred years. I'm going to miss things like this sitting at a desk, but maybe it's time for someone else to take the responsibility.

Don't lie to yourself, Jim-boy...anyone else, but not yourself. The weight of the command is being put on someone else only because there's no way 'Fleet will let you keep it right now. Be a good soldier for a while, show you can take orders as well as give them, and maybe someone, someday will give you your Lady back. Not very likely, but stranger things have happened. Life will go on without her. Have to be the best admiral they ever saw. Life will go on without Spock and Bones and the rest of the crew. It won't be the same. It won't be enough...but enough. Stop feeling sorry for yourself. Make your cool and polite farewells to the little creatures. Contact the ship and tell them we're ready to beam up...oh, Seligsen says he'll be along in a few minutes.

Bones and Spock still look a little worried. I'll have to tell them later that we won. Wish I still knew what game we were playing. Wonder if I'm changing like they are. They're both planning for their new lives. One's turning into the classic 'country doctor' and the other into the perfect Vulcan. Hope they both are going to be more satisfied in their new roles than I think I will be.



Can't be negative. Remember, have to set a good example even when no one will know...especially when no one will know. Bet I can shake up the Admiralty a little. Might be fun.

Transporter is on...I can feel it, see us in the window shimmering away. Today is going to be OK. Let the future take care of itself. Wonder what the others are thinking.

SELIGSEN: Only Starfleet could be stupid enough to break up a team like that. Well, now to say my official farewells to our friends here. So proud, violent, emotional, basically intelligent. Much more humanlike than the Vendrii. Still it doesn't hurt our reputation any to be seen to stand up for our relatives...no matter how far back the basic stock was tampered with. A little genetic engineering and you have humanoids without the brains god gave the grapefruit. And they are reputed to be extremely tasty. Especially the little ones. What they look like shouldn't matter. Maybe a person would be better off not thinking about it too deeply.

Not thinking about things is the Zerkees' finest attribute as far as I'm concerned. So soothing to be surrounded by the mind-blind. This damn "fog" they live in increases telepathic powers. At least mine. Spock didn't seem affected, though of course it is difficult to tell with Vulcans. I still couldn't get their thoughts in words, but the emotions came through clearly.

What is this creature chattering on about? Oh, the next conjugation ceremony. I thought they were accepting that trick awfully easily until we got our translating figured out correctly so that it turns out that they live not ten times ten years, but rather ten times ten times ten times ten years. Well, it will still be someone else's problem. Maybe they will have turned vegetarian by then. Sure, and Kirk will be happy in a desk job.

Now we make bows of infinite politeness. The leader flutters his little wings and informs me that this breach of protocol will be forgiven this time. He/she/it doesn't have much choice. They need the Federation more than we need them, but we're all playing a game here and they seem to know the rules by instinct.

But still one more pro forma complaint about the Vendrii. Time to put on the mask of polite attention and ignore him. Wonder how long Dr. Mc Coy will be content to stay peacefully on Earth. Any place is a prison if you can't leave it. Spock...I don't think anyone understands how he thinks. He doesn't, that's for sure. On Vulcan he'll definitely grow older...he may even grow up. And Kirk will certainly liven things up a bit in Starfleet.

Their relationship can be felt in the air. I'm sure they would lie for each other, lots of people will do that. But I think they would even tell the truth. Now that's rare in my experience.

It's little things...like the way they positioned themselves for beam-up. The two moving aside so Kirk could stand between them. In the window I could see their reflections for a few seconds. For a moment they were touching each other before the transporter took them.

The Zerkee leader is finishing up now... *So why the unbridled interference in our affairs over the question of these animals' lives? All things are impermanent; even we die.*

But the leader is wrong. I have seen and felt. Some things are meant to live forever.



# The Dream

Ginna LaCroix

He could not remember how long he had been alone--maybe all his life. It seemed forever.

At home nowhere; friend to no one.

He did not know how long he had been standing staring at the inky blackness, as dark as his existence, offering as little hope of fulfillment as anything had offered him in the life he had not asked to live.

Then in the blackness a soft glow started, a muted gold, gentle, welcoming, a circle of light in the middle of nothingness.

He watched silent and uncertain as the glow reached out towards him.

Slowly a brilliant ring of light surrounded the gold circle--and him. He felt a sudden, inexplicable acceptance of the presence. The circle of light passed right through his body and filled him with emotions he never dreamed existed.

He did nothing to fight.

Indeed, it was open surrender.

An answering ring of light slowly left him to surround the golden circle. A dimmer circle of his own making orbited on that ring around the circle from which he now drew his life and strength.

Suddenly forever was not enough time.

Gradually a third ring formed around him, intersecting with the other, smaller, thinner, but its light just as intense. A smaller, bluish orb appeared outside the rings, accepted as belonging, yet separate from what he felt and shared with the glowing golden light.

He did not notice when the bond began forming. He did not notice when his emotions started to overwhelm the fragile control of his Vulcan training. He only noticed that the rings appeared to be shrinking, threatening to bind him, to strangle him. Suddenly the feeling of peace was gone.

The golden circle was growing, nurtured by his responding emotion. He felt his fear begin. He could not deal with what was happening. He was the one who had started it, yet he could not deal with it. The light was giving more than he could accept, giving more than he knew he could ever return. Terror-stricken, he struggled to free himself from the binding rings before the ever-strengthening bond destroyed forever the separate being he had struggled his entire life to become.

With a loud cry he broke free, destroying the golden circle which had been, for a brief moment, the center of his existence. The blackness fell again, darker than any he had ever experienced.

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Spock woke abruptly, trembling from the horror of his dream and terrified at its meaning.

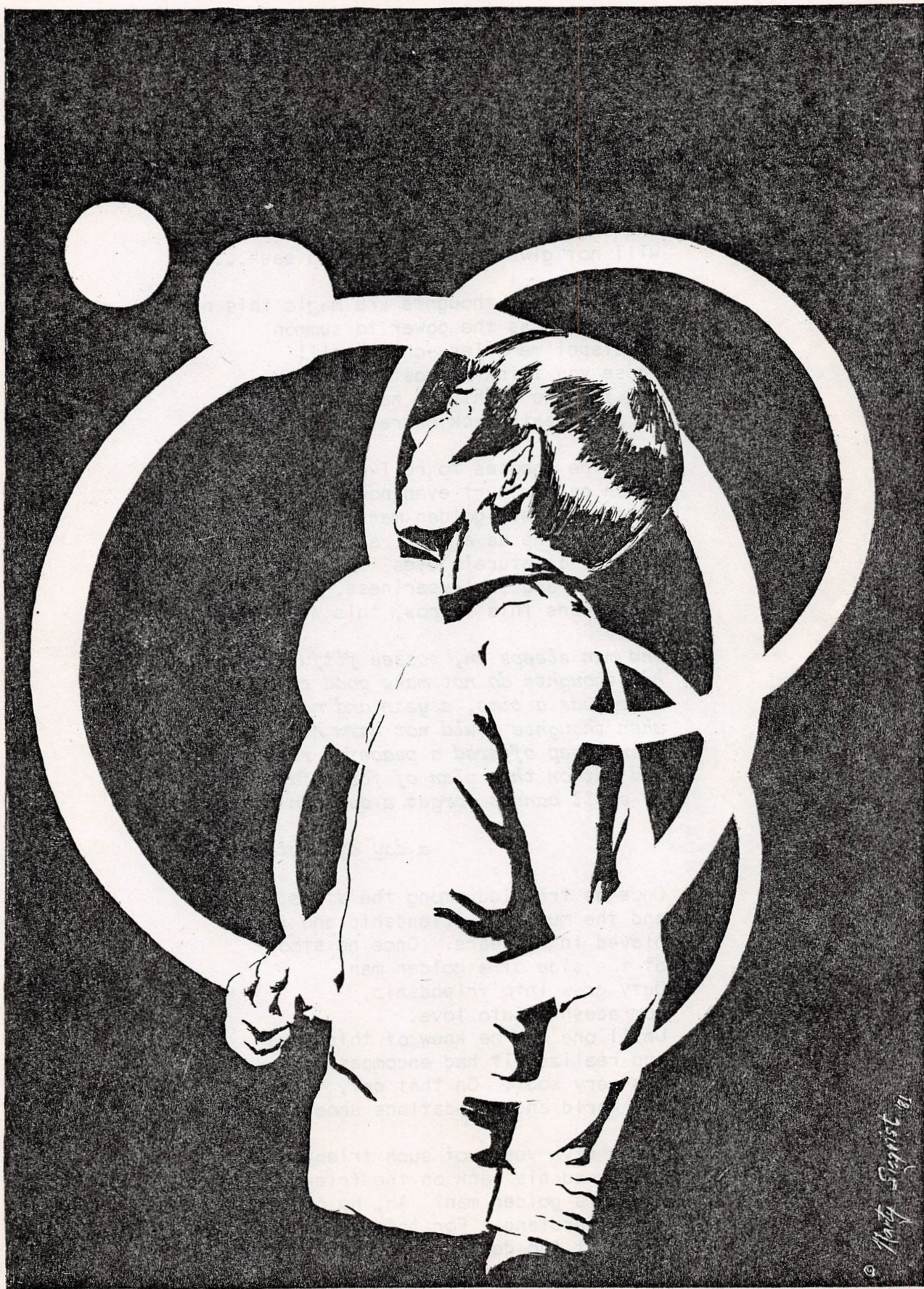
Taking a deep breath, he got up, his eyes involuntarily going to the chronometer even though he was well aware of the time. In 3.7 hours he would be standing in front of his captain, telling him of Starfleet's acceptance of his request.

In 3.7 hours he would tell James T. Kirk that he was leaving to go back to Vulcan--forever.

In 3.7 hours he would irreparably hurt the only person in the universe he loved.

A few moments ago, in a dream, he had destroyed that light. In a mere 3.7 hours he would do the same with reality.





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" . . .your young men shall see visions. . ."

Dreamer, dreamer awake!  
For the sun lingers on the horizon  
and the night beasts lurk closer,  
closer! The sun has burned its golden way  
into your mind, your soul  
and I fear that the moons  
will not give you the rest you seek...

Dreamer, your thoughts are magic this night.  
Your mind has the power to summon  
or dispel memories--chose well!  
Those you think of most come back  
and for the night you have the power  
to push death back or relive a memory.

See! he chooses to relive that  
which causes hurt even now.  
This man, this golden man of his mind,  
why comes he as a lion, a predatory beast?  
In this creature's eyes is sorrow  
and pain and soul-weariness.  
What means this sorrow, this weariness?

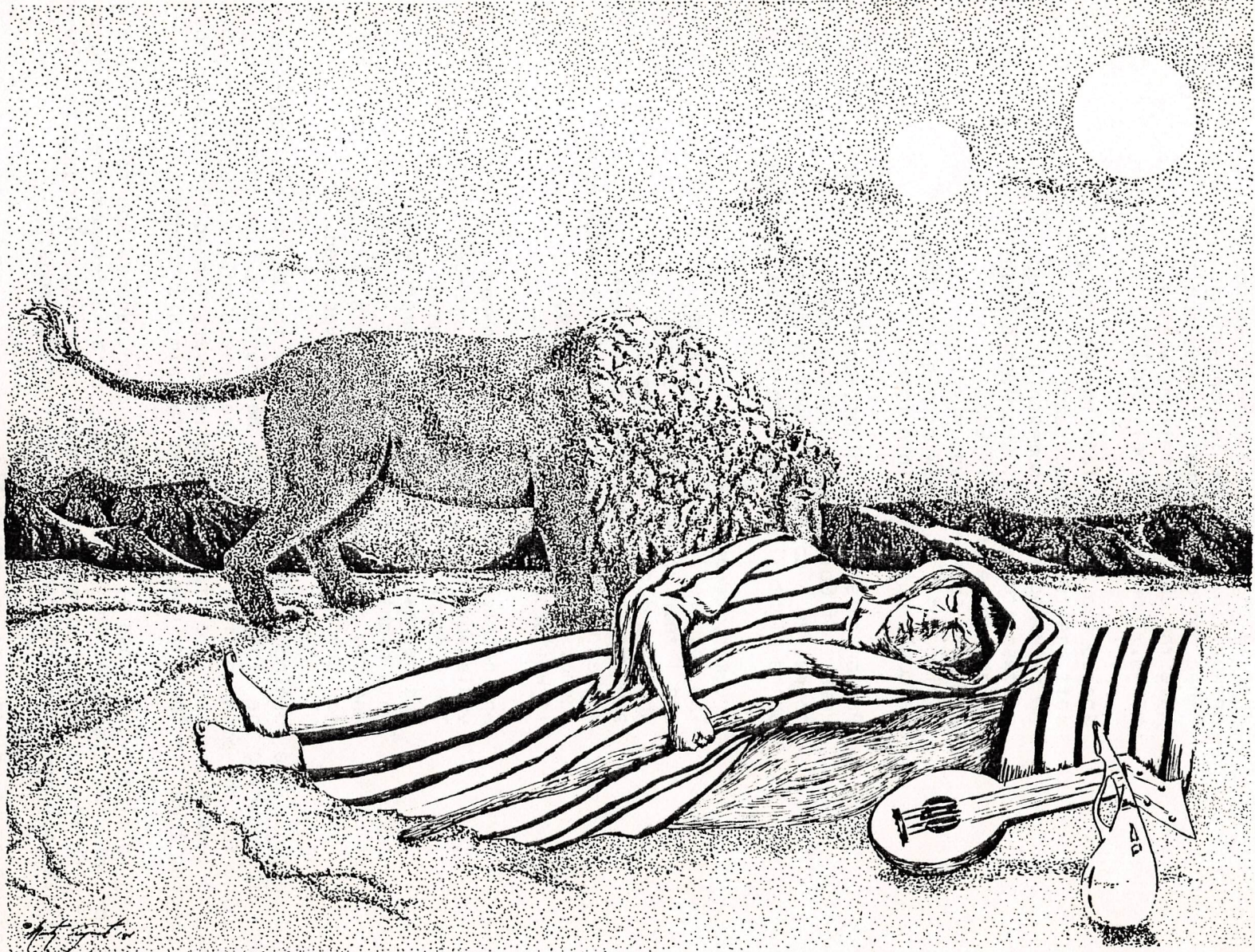
*The man sleeps on, tosses fitfully,  
his thoughts do not make good company.  
There was a time, a year and more ago,  
when thoughts could not harm him,  
when sleep offered a peaceful respite.  
And yet on this plan of forgetfulness,  
he still cannot forget a certain day.*

*a day of certain pain.*

Once he traveled among the stars,  
and the music of friendship and love  
played in his ears. Once he stood  
at the side of a golden man.  
Duty grew into friendship,  
comradeship into love.  
Until one day he knew of this love  
and realized it had encompassed  
his very soul. On that day,  
his world and foundations shook apart.

After five years of such friendship  
he turned his back on the friend, comrade.  
And this golden man? Ah, he could  
not understand. For this was a blow  
that cut too deeply. All the gods above  
could not afford him peace or hope now.







The sleeper remembers words, harsh  
and cold and speaking of finality.  
"I don't understand. What about all  
that we shared?" His friend has no  
answer...his silence is condemning.  
"Then get out of here! If you don't  
have the decency to tell me what's  
wrong, then get the hell *out*!"

And so the sleeper left the stars...  
left the friend, the dream.  
He returned to his homeworld, a place  
of desolate deserts. Here, his heart  
sought peace and solitude.  
And yet, something was missing,  
a piece of the jigsaw of his life that  
he could not bring into focus.

And on this magical night, on the  
desert of Gol, he chooses the power  
to relive a solitary moment of farewell  
so he might find a clue to the missing piece.

Dreamer, dreamer awake!  
The spectre at your side beckons,  
and I fear you will not discover  
what you long to find! Awake,  
see what I can see, that even you--  
mortal of a race of mortals, yet somehow more--  
cannot find! The secret is here,  
it waits patiently at your side.

Ah, he sleeps on. And the lion-man  
vanished slowly, the victim of non-belief.  
The sleeper stirs restlessly again  
and he has lost the power to comprehend  
this night of magic, this night of spells.  
And the power comes but once in a lifetime  
for any mortal...the gift has vanished.

And early in the morning he awoke, knowing that the key to his soul-searching  
had been close during the night. Frustrated, he pounded a fist in the sand around  
him, wishing for the power of tears, knowing they would only be sucked from his  
body as the desert takes all moisture. He rolled over, turned his face to the two  
moons hanging lower in the sky now, and tried to calm his thoughts.

Giving up finally, he rose silently, broke camp, and walked toward the high  
plateau of Gol. He dismissed the broken threads of a half-remembered dream, bit-  
terly deriding the myths that some had spoken of regarding this campsite. He was  
nearly a disciple now; such thoughts were nearly blasphemous.

And yet as he walked away, clearing his mind, ridding himself of such  
thoughts, he overlooked the paw prints in the sand, blowing away in the dry, hot  
winds of the Vulcan desert....



# Beggars Would Ride

Cheryl Rice

The woman cradled in his arms was either dying or already dead. He pulled the impatient horse to a halt at the river's edge. The coruscating lights of the aurora in the night sky were casting dancing shadows over the rock-strewn ground and mist covered water. He was conscious of an aching weariness deep within himself and something that was dangerously close to sorrow.

She stirred slightly and spoke his name with a surprisingly firm voice. "And why have we stopped?"

"It is necessary to wait here until moon-rise. It is too dangerous to attempt a crossing until we can see our way more clearly."

With dimming eyes, she tried to look through the mist. "This whole journey was doomed from the start. I told you that many times. Nothing can save me. If I can accept that, why cannot you?"

He pulled her closer. Her raven-dark head slipping under his chin. "Because it is so unfair. You are so young."

She made a noise of bitter amusement. "Unfair? You show your human blood again to your shame. Whatever Vulcan expected life to be fair?"

"Whatever human didn't?" That difference in outlook, he reflected almost bitterly, could help explain why his dual natures had never been able to merge. Why he had never fit into either society comfortably. But it was too late for such thoughts now. He strained his eyes through the near dark. Just for a moment he could see the city of his desires, Crenellated battlements and jewel colored, spiraling minarets wavered in the uneasy light. Fog and mist swirled around their tops like ghostly smoke. It had the aura of something older than time and heart-breakingly beautiful.

And for a shattering moment he wanted to be there, to have this endless journey over and done. To no longer be responsible for this querulous woman. But his sense of duty, as usual, stepped forward to regain control and he considered himself obliged to attempt to settle her more comfortably.

The horse stamped its feet impatiently at the delay. He patted the raw-silk hide, knowing that if he were alone he would dare the crossing. "Hold on," he urged the woman. "The city is within sight. There will be help within its walls."

"No help for me anywhere in creation," she intoned in a voice expressionless even for a Vulcan. Her face was ivory with the pallor of approaching death. "And nothing for me or any true Vulcan in that place. I do not wish to enter the gates."

"I do." He shielded the thought fiercely. It had been endless years since he had allowed himself to want anything so much. A wave of longing lowered his defenses and other thoughts insinuated themselves.

*Esteemed one, it is far past time for the Revered Elder to attend the Council Assembly. They have need of his wisdom and experience.*

*Silence. This morning the esteemed Spock is in deep personal meditation. It would be most illogical to interrupt such communion with his innermost being.*

*But the delegation from Earth is here. Not since the Romulan war has there been such danger for all the Federation. His experience is unique. He understands humans so well.*

*Too well, perhaps. The strain after all these years might be too much for him. Even Vulcans are not immortal. And even for a Vulcan he is old.*

*Is it true, the talk about him? That he was never the same after the Enterprise was lost?*

*Your language shows the unfortunate contamination of human beings. Lost? Is a Starship then*



*misplaced as if it were some child's toy? The Enterprise was destroyed with all hands while he was being held hostage on a Romulan ship. But he escaped and was invaluable in turning the tide of battle. At least that is how the official story has come to us from Starfleet.*

*Yes Esteemed one, so we learn in school. Then he returned permanently to Vulcan and has remained here ever since, all these many years, as one of our greatest citizens.*

*There are also those who say that his career among the stars was too much for his mixed blood. That he burnt out early and came to Vulcan simply because he had nowhere else to go.*

*With all due respect, sir, I cannot find it in me to believe that. Now perhaps when he is so ancient and ailing...but then? In his prime?*

*We will discuss this at some other time. The meeting begins. I shall do my best to represent his point of view. No one is irreplaceable.*

The tiny voices in his head moved off until they could be ignored again.

The moon was rising. Full and sweet and golden yellow. And the woman, suddenly heavier, was dead.

The horse as if aware stamped in sudden fright, but he gentled the animal and urged it into the water.

For the first time in his life he was fully alive. The weight had fallen off somewhere along the line and he could have howled with an animal, irrational glee. So she hadn't wanted to cross the water? Then she wouldn't. He let her slip from his encircling arms and into the current where she sank without a trace.

With bare heels he rib-kicked the horse and it scrambled up the far bank and headed for the city at a steady canter.

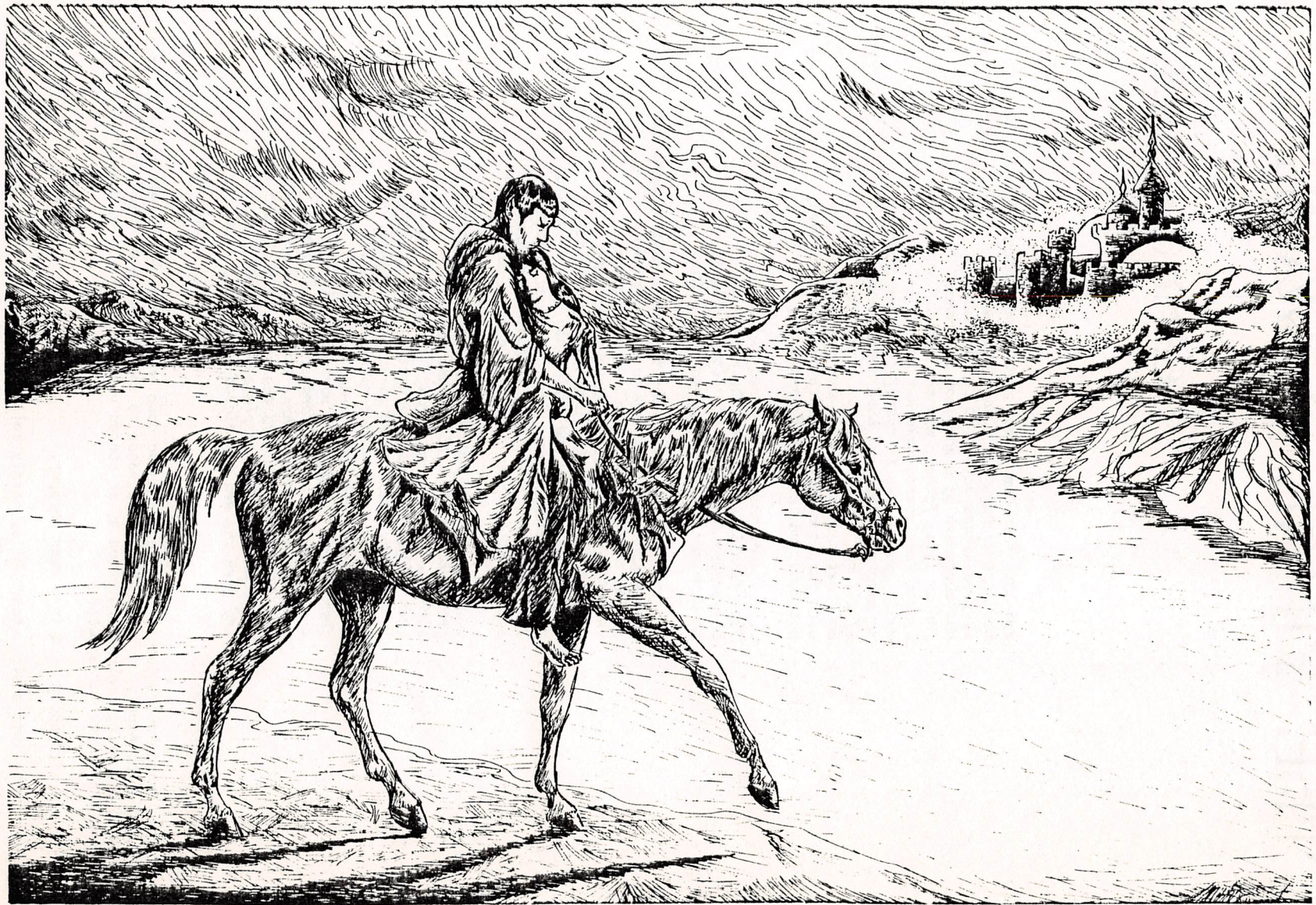
But he was in no extreme hurry. He had been waiting for this moment for more years than most men lived. And they had been awaiting him. Their bright pure light gone dark too young.

As he neared the city he could hear the sound of distant bells like music from another reality. But this was the only one that mattered. Before he entered the wide-flung gates he paused long enough to enjoy the ethereal loveliness as the aurora shed its glory over tower and wall. He knew the heart-breaking beauty would endure long after there were hearts to break for it.

But they were awaiting him. And their love and spirits could be found nowhere else in any universe. And neither could he.

But even that was only part of the reason why he entered so joyfully into the city on a wave of ashes and moonlight. Sapphire and smoke.







# THE FINAL VOYAGE

JEANNE CAVELOS

*"...When I  
set sail from Circe who, more than a year,  
had kept me occupied close to Gaeta  
(before Aenaeas called it by that name),  
not sweetness of a son, not reverence  
for an aging father, not the debt of love  
I owed Penelope to make her happy,  
could quench deep in myself the burning wish  
to know the world and have experience  
of all man's vices, of all human worth.  
So I set out on the deep and open sea  
with just one ship and with that group of men,  
not many, who had not deserted me.*

*...I and my mates were tired old men.  
Then finally we reached the narrow neck  
where Hercules put up his signal-pillars  
to warn men not to go beyond that point.*

*...'Brothers,' I said, 'who through a hundred thousand  
perils have made your way to reach the West,  
during this so brief vigil of our senses  
that is still reserved for us do not deny  
yourself experience of what there is beyond,  
behind the sun, in the world they call unpeopled.  
Consider what you came from: you are Greeks!  
You were not born to live like mindless brutes  
but to follow paths of excellence and knowledge!'*

*...Five times we saw the splendor of the moon  
grow full and five times wane away again  
since we had entered through the narrow pass--  
when there appeared a mountain shape, darkened  
by distance, that arose to endless heights.  
I had never seen another mountain like it.  
Our celebrations soon turned into grief:  
from the new land there rose a whirling wind  
that beat against the forepart of the ship  
and whirled us round three times in churning waters;  
the fourth blast raised the stern up high, and sent  
the bow down deep, as pleased Another's will.  
And then the sea was closed again, above us."*

*(from Dante's Inferno)*

Kirk turned toward Spock, lubricant smeared down one side of his cheek. "Well?" he said, trying not to sound too hopeful. Spock lifted his hands to the underside of the ship that was supported over them, adjusting controls revealed by an opened panel. Spock looked down at Kirk, waiting until he had held his gaze for a moment.

"That's it," Spock said in a near whisper.

Kirk broke into a slow, easy smile, hardly believing the work of over three years was now nearly



completed.

"We did it! We did it, Spock!" Kirk looked up at the ship triumphantly. Spock took Kirk's arm, leading him to the far side of the ship.

"There's something I want to show you, Jim."

Kirk followed hesitantly, looking warily at his old friend. Spock led them out from underneath the ship and then turned Kirk so that he faced the newly painted side of the ship.

Kirk's jaw dropped open as his eyes stared in a longing and affection he hadn't realized was so strong. She was named "Enterprise". Kirk looked at Spock, completely at a loss.

"Spock..."

"That's the way we all wanted it Jim." Kirk's eyes were drawn back to the ship. He remembered the long sleek lines of the original Enterprise. It seemed like just a moment ago he had walked the corridors within its giant hull, commanded the restrained strength of its powerful engines. He had lost the Enterprise twice, but it would never happen again.

The first time, he had accepted a promotion to Admiral after his five year mission aboard the Enterprise had ended. He had not realized, then, how important the ship was to him. Or perhaps he had, but tried to hide the truth from himself. After two and one-half years as Chief of Starfleet Operations, Kirk felt himself slipping away, and knew that he had to get back a ship of his own. When an emergency arose threatening Earth, he took the opportunity to take command of the Enterprise once again. He had commanded it many years, refusing any attempt at promotions or transfers. His senior officers had all remained as well, all becoming parts of a legend.

When Kirk finally felt that he would soon no longer be able to carry out his duties as well as a younger man, he began making plans to build his own ship for deep space exploration. He set about designing light, efficient, extremely powerful engines for his ship with ingenuities in the design coming from his wider perspective as a person not in the field, his strong intuitive abilities, and his not inconsiderable knowledge. He would never be without a ship again.

Kirk tried to contain his excitement, but before long Spock began talking about interesting places to explore, and certain new power conversion theories, and Kirk realized he had not been as secretive as he had thought. Soon they were both planning their trip, with suggestions coming in from all the crew. When Scotty heard of some of the engineering innovations being discussed, he too became involved. Working with engines was where Scotty belonged, not in some paper-pushing job the Federation was trying to get him into. When the Federation request arrived one year later stating, in a most democratic way, that Kirk and his fellows must either accept a promotion to "less hazardous duty" or resign their posts, they all resigned. Kirk, Spock, McCoy and Scotty then devoted the next three years of their lives to modifying an ordinary star-cruiser into the fastest, sleekest, lightest ship ever built. The former Ship's Surgeon, Doctor Leonard McCoy felt a little out of place during these years, but was soon skillfully assisting Scotty and taking great relish in designing his own limited medical facilities aboard the ship, finally free from the "computer centers" he was normally forced to work in. Kirk tore his gaze from the ship.

"Jim," a voice called from across the hangar.

"I believe Mr. Scott is requesting our presence, Jim."

Kirk took one last look at the ship and then nodded at Spock. "I hope he's got the rewiring on that console worked out. I want everything to go right for Sulu when he comes today."

Sulu, once a helmsman for the Enterprise under Kirk, had been promoted and transferred to commander on the Constitution. He had been an exemplary officer and in line for the Captaincy when a terrible accident maimed him even beyond the ability of the advanced Federation technology to repair. Confined to a mobile unit (some-what reminiscent of the primitive "wheelchair") he was still able to function reasonably well, but could never again serve in a position of responsibility on a starship.

Sulu was placed in an Earth hospital, and McCoy soon took charge of the process of rehabilitation. Sulu had been severely depressed for some time, his professional life forever cut off from him, his own body a strange mixture of skin, wire, bone, metal, and alien-looking claws. McCoy began to get him caught up in the challenge of controlling his own body again, and slowly Sulu gained strength. He began asking about the ship, how their plans were proceeding, where they would go. McCoy realized Sulu needed some kind of involvement, and began showing him the plans for the engines, sensors, medical facilities, and other components of the ship.



When Kirk came to visit him, Sulu asked for a place on the ship. Kirk quietly told him there would be no return from this voyage, but Sulu replied, "There's nothing left here for me, Jim. I've got no family, no ties, except for all of you. My life has been devoted to the Federation and space exploration for so long, I can't imagine living without it." The things we find out there--amazing, awesome, startling, frightening, comic, revealing...you can understand it, Jim. I'm just like you. They're what makes life worth living. Please take me."

The furious redesigning of some of the consoles aboard the ship began immediately, with McCoy analyzing Sulu's abilities and then working with Scotty to design a system Sulu could handle easily.

Kirk and Spock walked up the ramp into the ship to see a triumphant Scotty standing over a finished console.

"It's ready when he is."

McCoy arrived with Sulu later that day, to find the three men standing proudly in front of the ship to greet him. Kirk stepped forward.

"What do you think of her, Sulu?"

"She's beautiful, Cap--uh, Jim."

Kirk smiled.

"Old habits die hard, I guess," Sulu said sheepishly.

"You could always call him Tiberius," Spock contributed helpfully, raising an eyebrow.

"Spock!" Kirk said, trying to keep a straight face.

Sulu laughed, and Scotty said, "I think it's about time we let the lad see the inside of 'er. Come along, Sulu."

At the sight of the controls built into his console, Sulu's eyes grew very wide.

"Scotty, you've performed a miracle!"

Sulu, Scotty and McCoy spent the rest of the day hunched over the new console, testing it for comfort. Everything was ready for the trip now, except for the formal setting of the destination.

The five met in a restaurant the following day. After they had finished their meal, Kirk began. "Well, I guess everyone knows the only thing holding up our launch is the setting of her course. We've equipped--" Kirk smiled slightly at Spock "--the Enterprise with all the engine, sensor and deflector power possible in a ship of this size. A trip of extended duration is possible with the suspended animation capability Dr. McCoy has incorporated into the life-support systems. I think we've all thought about the possibilities before, so let's discuss them now while we're all together."

Scotty spoke first. "Jim, I've been workin' on this with you for a long while now, makin' innovations in the engines and other systems that I never would've believed were possible, but I could never quite figure out where we'd be takin' her when we were through. The stars...well, they've almost all been explored now. Captain Uhura tells me the unexplored sectors will be almost nonexistent in about ten years. There's just no place left to go...to explore."

McCoy leaned forward onto the table. "What's that you said, Scotty?"

"I said there's no place left to go, Leonard," Scotty replied more loudly.

Kirk shook his head. McCoy had a device to aid his hearing, and could have had an operation to cure him, but he'd always refused to have any part of it.

Sulu broke in, a hint of panic in his voice. "On the Constitution, we were doing exploration work all the time, but I never realized the unexplored regions were growing so small. There must be somewhere we can go!"

McCoy looked questioningly at Kirk, then at Spock, and then back at Kirk. "Now Jim, I can't believe you'd let things go this far without having a plan. So let's hear it."

Kirk smiled at McCoy. "All right, Bones. I just wanted to hear what everyone else was thinking first. I've been aware of the problems for some time now, and can find only one solution. Each one of us must make his own personal decision whether or not he wants to go. The challenge is immense; it's



something that has never been attempted by man before. What we might find if we were to succeed, we can only imagine. I guess you've wondered why I requested the suspended animation unit...."

Scotty's eyes had grown quite wide while Kirk was speaking, and then he spoke softly, as if afraid to even speak the words. "Another galaxy."

"Yes," Spock answered quietly. He had surmised their destination at the beginning, soon after Kirk had thought of it.

"Is that possible?" McCoy asked.

"Are we not Greeks?" Spock said, so quietly only Kirk heard. Kirk shot a questioning look toward Spock, a look which turned slowly to comprehension. He smiled at the comparison of himself to Ulysses.

"Another galaxy," Sulu said, leaning forward onto the table.

They settled their earthly affairs by the end of the week and were off the next day. There was a kind of magic on the ship those first few weeks before they reached the galactic border. The good friends were finally back in space together, and their excitement at what they might finally encounter was just barely suppressed under the surface.

During one of their free periods, Kirk called Spock over to a storage compartment and pulled a small three-dimensional chess set out.

"Rematch, Spock?"

Spock turned to a similar compartment in the opposite wall and brought out an identical set.

"Indeed, Jim."

A few days later, they had successfully penetrated the galactic border, and a black void stretched out ahead of them. The engines, much to Mr. Scott's delight, were operating at phenomenal speeds, and the men prepared to enter suspended animation. They celebrated their last meal together and, with much back slapping, and perhaps slightly more sentiment than was proper for ex-Starfleet officers, they entered their compartments one by one as McCoy supervised the process.

When Kirk, Spock and McCoy were left, and Spock prepared to enter his cubicle, Kirk turned to him. "So this is what it all comes down to. Goodbye, old friend." Kirk was unsure of what else to say. "I'll see you in the promised land."

Spock raised an eyebrow. "Or in two hundred forty-six point three-nine-two years, Jim. Rest well." Spock gestured for Kirk to enter his compartment as well, and as McCoy put the two into a deep sleep, Kirk felt Spock's mind approach his. With Kirk's silent approval, his mind linked with Spock's as they both fell into the silent sleep of oblivion.

McCoy set the controls to automatic after making sure all the sleepers were in stable condition, and took one last look at the viewscreen to the pinpoint of light shining in the distance. McCoy entered his cubicle and prepared for the long sleep. As he heard the mixture of gases hissing into the closed compartment, he murmured, "God help us all."

He had decided it smelled like peaches, or maybe oranges, and then proceeded to try to figure out where the hell he could possibly be where it would smell like oranges, before he finally decided he should try to open his eyes. When he did, Kirk realized the suspended animation machinery had functioned properly, and he was being awakened first to check on their position and revive the others if the time was right. Kirk checked their coordinates and found that within three days they would reach the galactic boundary. He revived McCoy next, so that the doctor could oversee the process in case anything untoward happened.

The men sat at their consoles, their eyes staring at the viewscreen as the galaxy loomed ahead.

"We made it," Sulu whispered breathlessly.

Kirk smiled, and tore his gaze away from the viewscreen to look at Spock, and then McCoy, Scotty and Sulu. "Yes, we made it," Kirk said, hardly believing it himself.

Suddenly warning lights flashed on throughout the ship.

Spock spoke from where he sat by his console. "Energy storm created by the galactic barrier, Jim, setting up a terrific turbulent force."



"Shields, Scotty."

"Deflector shields on, Jim, but I've never seen anything like this. That energy force is greater than anything I've ever heard of before. Our shields canna take the strain."

"Full reverse power, Sulu, I'm channeling all auxiliary power into the engines," Kirk said, punching buttons at what seemed an impossibly fast pace.

"The storm is surrounding us, Jim, we cannot escape from it."

"Full forward thrust then, Sulu. Maybe we can get through it before we sustain any serious damage."

"Losing power in deflectors, Jim," Scotty said worriedly.

"Channeling power into deflector screens. Bones, auxiliary life-support power."

McCoy looked down onto the mass of flashing warning lights his console had become. "Rerouting auxiliary life-support to Scotty."

Sulu called to Kirk. "We're losing forward velocity, Jim."

"I'm channeling all remaining power to you, Sulu, for a final burst of energy. Channel all power into the engines."

"Engaging power now."

The engines whined under the strain.. All of Kirk's muscles tensed, as if by their effort alone they could move the ship. "Come on," Kirk said through clenched teeth.

The whine grew louder, and Kirk heard Scotty say, "Engines on overload!"

Then all went deathly silent as the universe seemed to spin around them, and the ship was dragged slowly down into the storm.

Kirk became aware of a growing light ahead of him, as the ship around him seemed to fade. He was no longer sure where he was. He seemed drawn toward the light ahead, though he didn't know how, or why. Suddenly he was aware of Spock next to him; it was more of a feeling, a knowledge, than a sensory experience.

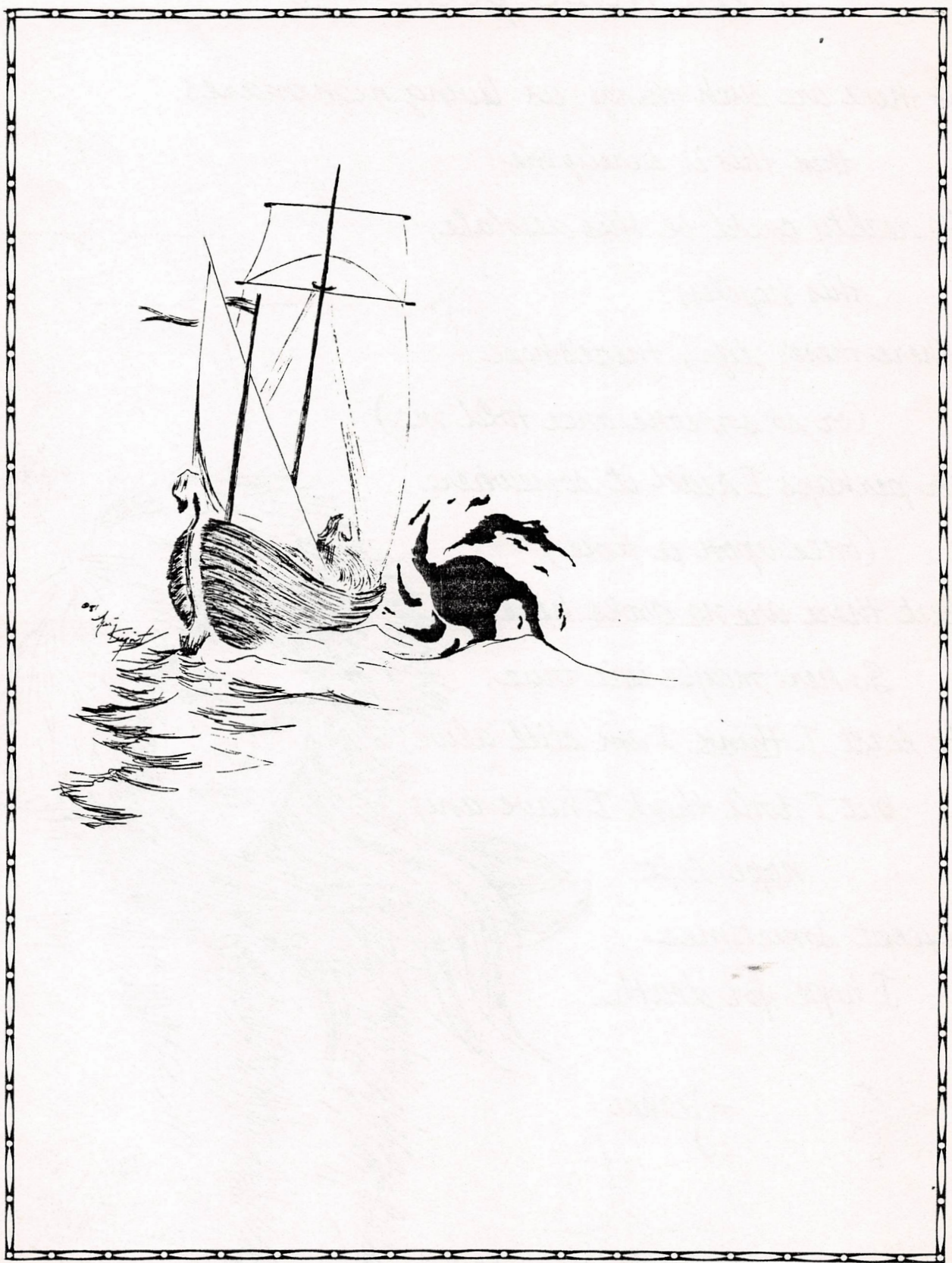
"I believe we have gone further than we had planned, Jim. Not just another galaxy, but another dimension, beyond time and space. Fascinating."

Kirk looked back into the darkness with a slight twinge of regret, as beads of light coalesced around him. Ahead the light of billions of stars shown more purely, more terribly, than any he had seen before.

*"Fascinating is right, Spock. We have made it. I think...the ultimate truths we've all been searching for will finally be revealed to us. The knowledge of it all. The beauty. It's all here. It's incredible...."* Kirk's thought trailed off as he was caught up in the brilliance of the scene.

As they reached the boundary of light, each seemed to blaze with radiance, and then to meld into the pure shining light.







## Beta Niobe poem

if there are such things as living nightmares  
then this is surely one

No reality could be this desolate,  
this hopeless.

Where there's life, there's hope  
(or so someone once told me)

Or perhaps I read it somewhere  
(once upon a time)

but there are no books here,  
So here maybe isn't true.

At least, I think I am still alive;  
but I don't think I have any  
hope left

except sometimes  
I hope for death.

-jeanne





# Amulet

TONI CARDINAL PRICE

"Captain, I wish to request a short leave on my home planet Vulcan. On our present course, we can divert there with a loss of but..."

Spock's words faded to a drone in the background as James Kirk's insides constricted with fear. The blood rushed to his head as he stared open-mouthed at the Vulcan officer before him. Pressing firmly on the intercom panel on his desk, he demanded, "Bones, get to my quarters right away!"

Then, slumping back and looking again at Spock, he said, "All right, Spock... don't worry. We'll get you to Vulcan. The cargo shipment on Starbase 20 can wait. I'll inform Starfleet and..."

"Captain, I believe you may have..."

"It's all right, Spock," Kirk returned, his eyes narrowing with sympathy. "You don't have to explain. Bones will take you down to Sickbay and sedate you. I'll inform Vulcan of your problem and..."

"Captain," Spock interrupted, a bit more firmly, "You have misunderstood my request. I simply said that I would like to take a leave of absence on Vulcan. I did not say the need was imperative."

Kirk's eyebrows furrowed in confusion. "Then you're not..."

"Entering *pon faar*?" Spock completed the sentence for him. "No, Jim, I am not."

Kirk slumped with relief, and a grin formed on his lips. He opened his mouth to comment, but was interrupted as McCoy rushed into the room. "What is it, Jim?" the medical officer demanded, flashing a concerned look at the Vulcan beside him. "What's the emergency?"

"False alarm," Kirk returned, chuckling in his throat. "It was my fault. Spock asked for a leave on Vulcan, and I jumped to conclusions."

"A leave on Vulcan?" McCoy repeated, looking at Spock suspiciously. "Why do you want a leave on Vulcan?"

Spock's eyebrow rose slightly, and he gave a small sigh. "It is my home planet, doctor. I have not visited there for well over five years. I simply thought..."

"You're gettin' sentimental, aren't you?" McCoy said suddenly, his face breaking into a huge grin. "Jim, I believe our First Officer's goin' soft on us. I bet he misses his family. I bet he's homesick."

Spock looked coldly at McCoy, and turned his glance back to Kirk, who was trying to smother a grin. "Vulcans do not get 'homesick', Doctor," he said stonily, keeping his eyes on Kirk. "Captain, the diversion to Vulcan would cost the ship but two hours' travel time."

"Yes, Mr. Spock, I'm aware of that," Kirk returned, smiling mischievously. "But I would like



to know your reason for requesting leave."

For a moment, Spock looked startled -- it was not required that he give his reasons. Then he realized that his captain was caught up in the teasing with McCoy, and he sighed again. "I am... requesting leave..." he began, a trace of uneasiness in his voice, "... because there is a certain event within my family in two days, which I wish to be present for."

"An event?" Kirk echoed. "What kind of event?"

Spock glanced sideways at McCoy and took another deep breath. "It is... my mother's birthday, Captain."

Expecting a barrage of teasing, Spock was a bit startled when McCoy reacted with pleasure. "Amanda's birthday?" the doctor repeated. "Well, well, how about that?"

"Since we are already on a course which will take us relatively close to Vulcan," Spock continued, "I simply thought that..."

"All right, Spock -- permission granted," Kirk chuckled, interrupting him. "I'll have Chekov adjust the course."

"Thank you, Captain."

"Amanda's birthday..." McCoy mumbled again. "I kinda wish I could say happy birthday to her myself."

Spock looked at him with a raised eyebrow. "Would you care to accompany me, Doctor?" he asked abruptly.

McCoy flashed a startled look at him. "Accompany you? To Vulcan?" When Spock nodded, McCoy's surprise doubled. "Well, I... uh... no, no... I don't want to interfere, Spock. It's a family thing and -- "

"It would not be 'interference', Doctor. I have invited you. Vulcans do not celebrate birthdays; however, my father and I bow to certain Earth customs out of respect for my mother. I believe it may... please my mother to have another member of her own race present at this occasion."

"Well... I..." McCoy glanced at Kirk for an opinion, but the captain merely shrugged, still smiling. "Well... I'll let you know, Spock. I may be needed here, and..."

"You won't be needed, Bones," Kirk said. "The cargo pickup and transfer would only take a day at the most."

McCoy looked at him, and back to Spock. "Well... I'll let you know in a while, Spock. I have to take care of some things first."

"Very well, Doctor," the Vulcan returned. "I'll get back to my station now. If you gentlemen will excuse me?"

Kirk nodded, and watched as his First Officer exited. He turned, questioning, to McCoy. "What's the matter, Bones? You seem nervous at the prospect of going with Spock."

McCoy frowned as he walked over and took a seat opposite Kirk. "I guess I am," he admitted, after a moment. "I don't know how I'll feel being in the house with Spock and Sarek. I mean... I can tease Spock, and get away with it. But I don't want to say anything out of line to the Ambassador."

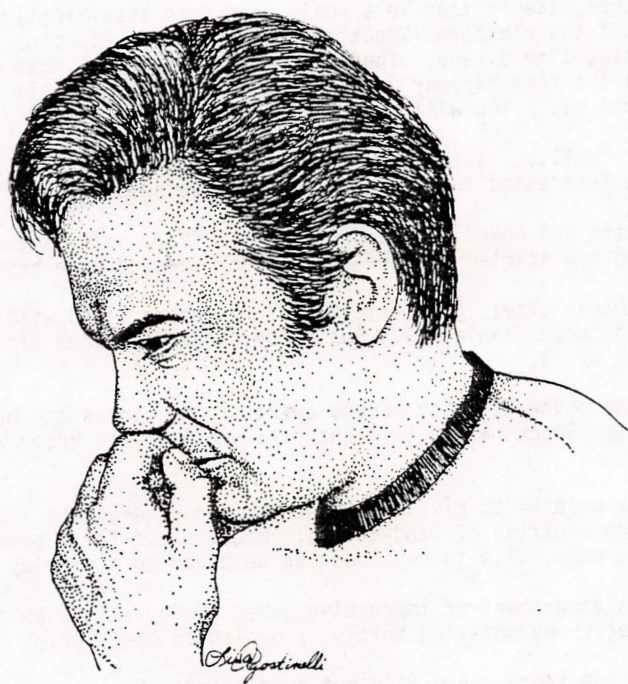
"I'm sure you wouldn't." Kirk grinned.

"And I don't know if I could take being in a house with all that... non-emotion."

"It's only for a day or two at the most, Bones," Kirk reminded him. "And Amanda will be there."

The doctor's eyebrows quirked in consideration of that thought. Then he nodded. "Yeah, I guess you're right. Besides, Amanda probably would like some 'emotional' company to help her celebrate. I'll think it over... maybe I'll go."







Two days later, Leonard McCoy stood on the transporter platform, looking almost uneasily at the First Officer beside him.

"Have you given the co-ordinates to Scottie?" Kirk was asking Spock, as they stood ready to bid each other farewell.

"Yes," Spock replied, nodding. "We will not be beaming directly to ShiKahr, but rather to Ta-ham'n, a larger city to the east. I have an... an errand I must tend to there."

"I see," Kirk returned. "We'll be leaving orbit as soon as you're beamed down. Will you be able to find transportation to ShiKahr?"

"Yes, Captain," Spock assured him, "I will enlist the service of an aircar for our travel."

"Good, good." Kirk stepped back and nodded to the two. "Have a good visit, then. We'll see you in about... forty hours." He grinned. "Spock, give my best to your mother and father. Bones... take care of our First Officer, will you?"

The doctor's eyebrows rose as he broke into a smile. "I sure will, Jim," he nodded. "I sure will."

The two Enterprise officers materialized in a small room used specifically for transporter functions. As they stepped off the platform, Spock turned to McCoy. "Doctor, you may prefer to remain here until I have completed my errand. The temperature outside is most likely to be over one hundred and five degrees, and the thin air may be uncomfortable for you. This room has been constructed specifically for human use. You will no doubt find it comfortable."

"I see." McCoy nodded. "Well... to tell you the truth, Spock, I think I could stand the heat for a short while. I'm kinda interested in lookin' around. I've never seen a Vulcan city."

Spock straightened a little and bowed his head slightly. "Very well, doctor. The errand will not take too long." He turned and started for the exit, McCoy keeping pace beside him.

Ta-ham'n was a typical Vulcan city; geometric buildings, roads lined with vegetation of yellow and brown, large pathways landscaped flawlessly. But McCoy, unused to such cities, found himself impressed by the serene beauty of it.

As they continued down the pathway, McCoy became aware of the stress the heat and thin air placed on his body. By the time Spock halted in front of a small store, McCoy was out of breath and sweating profusely.

"In here, Doctor." Spock pointed to his left. The two men entered the store and were greeted by the smell of incense and the tinkling of wind-chimes. McCoy stood for a moment, letting his eyes adjust to the darkness of the room, then joined Spock as he moved to a display counter.

Inside the counter was an assortment of impressive gems. McCoy raised an eyebrow when he realized the value of the jewels. He whistled softly, and glanced at Spock.

"Pretty expensive collection there. And it's not even guarded."

"Crime is practically non-existent on Vulcan, Doctor." Spock cast a sidelong glance at his companion. "When it does occur, it is usually perpetrated by outworlders."

McCoy scowled and looked back at the jewels. "Why did we come here anyway, Spock?"

The Vulcan officer inspected the gems before him. "I thought perhaps... that my mother might be... pleased, to receive a small token in honor of this day."

"A present!" McCoy beamed. "Isn't that rather sentimental of you, Spock?"

Spock's eyebrows rose, but he ignored the remark and reached into the case. He picked up two of the jewels, one amber-hued, the other turquoise. "Your opinion, Doctor?" he said after a moment, holding out the gems for McCoy to see. "Which do you think my mother would prefer?"

McCoy's smile widened as he enjoyed Spock's uncertainty. "Well," he said finally, "I think the amber would be nice, Spock. It'd compliment her eyes."



Spock considered that, frowning slightly. "Perhaps. However, I believe she would prefer the turquoise gem." He continued to study the stones contemplatively. Finally, he motioned the store's owner to approach.

"I will take both of these," he said, handing them to the man. "Can they be fashioned into amulets?"

"Of course," the elder Vulcan whispered. "It will be but a moment. Please seat yourselves." He disappeared into an adjoining room.

Spock motioned McCoy to a group of chairs in a dark corner. As they sat, McCoy asked, "Isn't that rather extravagant of you, Spock? Those jewels are pretty expensive. Buying both of them will probably set you back."

Spock glanced at him oddly. "Set me back, doctor?"

"Yes, you know... can you afford it?"

"Yes, doctor," Spock assured him, a tiny smile playing at the corners of his lips. "Money has little meaning for me -- except for..."

"Except for the pleasure it can bring others, eh, Spock?" McCoy completed, the teasing twinkle back in his eyes. "I'm sure your mother will be thrilled with your gift."

Spock nodded absently, and stood up as the owner of the shop reappeared. McCoy watched from where he sat as Spock concluded his business with the man, then stood and followed the Vulcan officer out the door.

Two hours later, they sat in a small aircar, skimming silently across the surface of the desert separating Ta-ham'n from ShiKahr. Spock worked the controls skillfully as McCoy observed the scenery with silent awe.

They had rented the aircar from an establishment in Ta-ham'n; within an hour it would have them in ShiKahr. As McCoy looked over at Spock, he almost thought he saw a flicker of excitement in the alien's dark eyes. He grinned.

"Guess you can't wait to see your parents again, Spock," he teased. "After all, it's been five years." Spock's eyebrows rose as he glanced at Spock, but he said nothing.

"What time do they expect us there?" the doctor asked.

"They do not expect us," Spock answered tonelessly, shifting slightly in his seat. "I thought, perhaps... my mother might be pleased by an... unexpected visit."

McCoy chuckled then, shaking his head. "Spock, you will never cease to amaze me! First the present -- now a surprise visit..."

"I see nothing unusual about my course of action, Doctor," Spock returned quietly. "It is merely out of consideration that I -- " The Vulcan's words cut off abruptly as his attention snapped sharply back to the control panel of the aircar. There was a mild jolt, and McCoy watched the Vulcan's long fingers press a few buttons and adjust the directional levers.

"What's wrong?" he asked finally, seeing Spock's furrowed brow.

"Unknown, Doctor. For a moment, the instruments appeared to -- " Another jolt halted his words as his hands flew to the levers once more.

"What's the matter?" McCoy demanded, grasping the arms of his seat as the aircar lurched. Spock ignored him and reached for the transmitter.

"This is Spock," he said into the small device, as sparks began to fly from the panel. "Aircar out of control. Position is... one hundred fifteen point two degrees west of Ta-ham'n, en route to ShiKahr. I have one passenger -- human. Immediate rescue procedure imperative." Then, as the car dropped sharply, Spock spared a glance for McCoy.

"Secure yourself, Doctor," he ordered. "I shall try to land as gently as possible, however -- "



His words were lost as the aircar hit the dry surface of the Vulcan desert and bounced wildly. Spock fought the controls, but the car hit again, then again, and tumbled over and over until it crashed to an explosive halt.

Spock was the first to regain consciousness. He became abruptly alert, alarmed by his extreme weakness. Pulling himself away from the twisted metal surrounding him, he glanced down and felt an instinctive tightening of stomach muscles. His left leg was mangled badly; blood flowed freely and flesh and bone had been pierced by a sharp chunk of metal. He steeled his mind against waves of pain and ripped a long piece of cloth from the bottom of his shirt. Fashioning a tourniquet around his upper thigh, he tightened it until the flow of blood slowed. Then, taking a deep breath and summoning his strength, he looked around for McCoy.

He found the doctor crumpled between two seats that had been thrown clear from the wreckage of the aircar. Crawling painfully, dragging his injured leg, Spock drew up beside the doctor and reached out to feel for a pulse. It was weak, but steady, and Spock inspected McCoy's body as best he could for injuries. The doctor seemed to have escaped major damage, but a deep, bleeding cut on his forehead caused Spock to tighten his lips with concern.

Very gently, he pried McCoy from the twisted metal and laid him in a comfortable position on the desert sand. Glancing around for the emergency medical kit, Spock found only fragments among the wreckage. Swiftly and carefully, he tore more of his uniform shirt and used it to crudely bandage McCoy's forehead. Then he sat back, watching the doctor for signs of consciousness.

It was many long minutes before McCoy stirred, and Spock was beside him in a flash, calling his name anxiously. The doctor's head moved to one side as his eyes opened, squinting at the blazing sun. "Spock?" he whispered weakly. "What in the name..."

"Do not try to move, Doctor," Spock instructed him. "And I would advise you to contain your speech. We've crashed, and you are injured, though I believe not severely. I notified Vulcan Central before the crash, so rescue should not be long in coming."

McCoy nodded and looked more closely at Spock. "How 'bout you, Spock? Are you all right?"

"Yes. I sustained only minor injuries," the Vulcan lied, moving his hand to shield his leg from the doctor.

But McCoy had seen the gesture, and his brow furrowed. "Let me see," he said, pointing to Spock's leg.

"It is nothing," Spock returned stiffly, keeping his arm where it blocked McCoy's view.

"Blast it, Spock! I said let me see!" McCoy shouted.

The Vulcan took a deep breath and moved his hand away from his thigh. McCoy flinched at the sight of the wound. He turned angry eyes upon Spock. "Nuthin', huh?" he spouted. "We'll have to get that metal out and you'll..." He stopped, still trying to sit up, and touched his forehead as a wave of pain struck him.

"You must remain still, Doctor," Spock insisted. "If you overexert yourself, the heat of the Vulcan sun and the thin air will drain your strength. Help will be arriving shortly. I shall remove the embedded metal myself, and will contain the flow of blood."

"Spock, you can't do all that yourself," McCoy objected, "just get me the medical kit and --"

"The medical kit was destroyed in the crash. You are far too weak, in any case, to attempt the procedure." Spock looked down at his wounded leg and pressed his lips together. With an inward grunt, he tightened the cloth tourniquet around his thigh.

"Pull it out as cleanly as possible," McCoy directed, watching from where he lay. "Try not to tear anything that's undamaged."

Spock raised one eyebrow at the doctor and resisted the urge to comment. Instead, he looked at his leg again, and very carefully wrapped his fingers around the sharp metal piercing the flesh. His hands trembled for a short moment; then he tightened his grip.

"Easy, Spock," McCoy said softly, watching the grimace of pain cross the Vulcan's face. "Just



take it nice an' easy."

With a deep breath for control, Spock pulled on the embedded metal, and it slid away from the ragged flesh. A cry of pain escaped Spock's lips, and he lay back, flat on the sand, as a wave of weakness encompassed him.

"Spock, you've got to concentrate on stopping the blood flow!" McCoy's voice prodded from the background. "Now, Spock -- before you get too weak!"

Spock nodded, and drew his brows together in concentration. McCoy watched the Vulcan closely from where he lay, and gave a sigh of relief when he saw the flow of green from Spock's thigh begin to subside. The doctor remained silent as he continued to observe the Vulcan. Spock's eyes were tightly shut, his hands clenched into fists at his side. He was obviously in pain, but McCoy dared not speak for fear of breaking the Vulcan's concentration.

The sun beat down mercilessly, and McCoy -- not for the first time in his life -- cursed the planet's heat. A wave of dizziness struck him, and he realized that he was weaker than he had thought. He closed his eyes against the blazing glare and felt himself sink slowly into unconsciousness.

Spock opened his eyes slowly, glancing around in alarm. He realized that he had been so deeply enmeshed in concentration against his pain that he had lost track of time. With confusion, he reasoned from the movement of the sun overhead that at least four hours had passed since the crash -- yet no search party had reached them. That filled him with real concern; with a great effort, he pushed himself into a sitting position and looked over at McCoy. The doctor lay limp and still, his clothing soaked with perspiration.

Spock looked down at his own leg then, taking a deep breath. His pants were matted against his skin with a thick crust of dried blood. He peeled the cloth away carefully, inspecting the open gash on his thigh. He had succeeded in slowing the blood flow until only a slow trickle of green oozed from the wound. But he hadn't placed himself in the healing trance -- he wanted to wait until they were rescued before attempting that.

Looking over at the doctor again, Spock could see that the Vulcan sun was taking its toll of him. McCoy's lips were cracked and dry, and his face was beginning to show signs of blistering. McCoy would need water soon, and shelter from the heat. Scanning the desert horizon, Spock leaned back and sighed heavily.

There was no logical reason for rescue operations to be taking so long; Vulcan Central had the finest available scanning devices. In his message, he had specifically mentioned his human passenger -- so rescue should have been especially swift.

Then a twinge of alarm hit the Vulcan as he considered that perhaps his message hadn't been heard. If not, then there was no hope for McCoy. Silently, Spock admonished himself for not forewarning his parents of their visit. If he had, they would have been expected to arrive at a certain time -- and when they were overdue, the authorities would have been alerted.

A wave of weakness struck Spock as he shifted position. He looked down at his wounded leg once more. It was imperative that he begin self-healing soon. In his state, if he were to lose consciousness, he would be helpless. With too much blood lost, he would be overly weak, unable to self-heal, and would gradually bleed to death.

Glancing back at McCoy then, Spock tightened his lips in frustration. He did not want to initiate the trance until he was sure McCoy was safe. Clenching his teeth against the numbing pain in his thigh, he lay back against the warmth of the sand. He would continue to contain the blood flow as long as possible. He pleaded silently that Air Rescue would have heard his message.

"This one is alive, Sekan!"

"Bring him around, then. And check the other!"

The mumble of deep voices roused Spock from his concentration. Before he could collect himself, he was dragged roughly to his feet. He cried out involuntarily as pain lanced through his leg, and his eyes shot open in startled response. In front of him stood a Vulcan of massive build, dressed in



a style that made Spock's eyes widen with curiosity.

"So... he lives." The huge man before him spoke. "But for how long? He bleeds -- his injury is severe."

"Should I kill him then, Sekan?" the Vulcan holding Spock asked.

"Yes. He does not appear to be of use to us, and -- "

"Sekan! Quickly!" A voice caused the huge Vulcan to turn, and the hands that held Spock abruptly released him. Spock bit back a cry of pain as he crumpled to the ground, and forced himself into a sitting position. He waited for his vision to clear as he looked in the direction where McCoy lay.

Surrounding the unconscious doctor were six Vulcans of uncommonly stocky build. They stood or knelt over McCoy, chattering in a dialect that Spock had recognized as Ancient Vulcan. With surprise, Spock noticed that their manner of dress was also ancient. And they carried weapons!

"A mutant," he heard one of the Vulcans say. "One like I have never seen!"

"Look! He bleeds a strange color!" another exclaimed.

Spock listened to the conversation with awe, his mind racing. Vulcans with weapons! And they didn't recognize McCoy as a human. Spock shook his head in confusion, then jerked when he felt a sharp object touch his shoulder.

A Vulcan female was kneeling beside him, her wide eyes regarding him with curiosity and distrust. The blade of the razor-sharp dagger she held pierced the first layer of skin on his arm as she held it against him.

"What Clan are you from?" she demanded in the ancient dialect.

Spock's eyebrows furrowed as he regarded the woman with blatant astonishment. "I... I do not understand," he returned in the same tongue.

The dagger in her hand pushed half an inch deeper into his arm, and a tiny trickle of green blood appeared. "What *Clan*!" she repeated, her dark eyes blazing.

Stunned by the woman's violence, Spock could think of but one logical reply. "I am from ShiKahr."

The woman's eyebrows rose in surprise, but the dagger remained in position. "How were you injured?" she snapped.

"Aircar," Spock replied, fighting a wave of dizziness. "The engine malfunctioned and the wreckage..."

His words trailed off as he looked around in shock. There was no sign of the wreckage anywhere. As far as he could see there was only barren desert.

The dizziness engulfed Spock again, and he felt himself sliding into unconsciousness. The woman put a firm arm around his shoulders and kept him sitting until the dizziness passed. Looking down at his leg, Spock saw that blood was flowing freely again, and an instinctive alarm tightened inside him. When he looked back to the Vulcan woman, he found that she was watching him curiously.

"T'Aka!" A voice called to the woman from the group of Vulcans surrounding McCoy. "Come see this mutant before we slay it!"

The woman left Spock hastily and ran to the others.

Spock watched her retreat as his mind whirled with questions. Illogical as it seemed to him, there was only one conclusion he could reach. The Vulcans before him were barbaric in nature; their language and dress, long obsolete. Somehow, by a means he could not decipher, he and McCoy had been thrown back through Vulcan's history... into ancient times. A knot of unaccustomed fear tightened in him as he realized the meaning of that, and he glanced over hastily at the Vulcans who surrounded McCoy.

He saw one of them raise a lance.



"Wait!" he cried out, summoning strength over his pain. He struggled and, incredibly, stood, resting his weight on his good leg. His mind raced for the right words to say. "The mutant is of value to my people. My Clan will pay well for his return... and for mine."

The Vulcan who had first faced Spock walked back to him now. "And what is your Clan?" he demanded.

"He comes from ShiKahr," the Vulcan female spoke up, moving next to the huge male.

"ShiKahr?" the man repeated. "There is much wealth in ShiKahr. What is your name?"

"I am Spock. My father's Clan is a powerful one -- and wealthy. They would... appreciate my safe return."

"No doubt they would. I am Sekan, leader of the Clan Ta-ham'n. Why is this mutant of value to you?"

"He is... a healer," Spock returned, a wave of pain piercing his leg. He swayed unsteadily.

"A healer!" Sekan laughed. "He is barely alive himself, and you call him a healer?"

"He is more fragile than we are," Spock explained, fighting the weakness that threatened to overtake him. "He needs water, and must be kept out of the sun." Seeing Sekan's face wrinkle with doubt, he repeated, "My father will pay you handsomely for our safe return."

"So you have said," Sekan pondered, his dark eyes scrutinizing Spock.

Spock stood there silently until a wave of dizziness finally drove him to his knees. A small gasp of pain escaped him as agony wrenched through his thigh.

"He needs T'Ena to heal him," the woman said, moving quickly to Spock's side. "If his father is of ShiKahr Clan, he could be worth much to us, Sekan. It would be unwise to let him and the mutant die. We must take them back to our camp."

There was a moment of silence. Then Sekan nodded. "Agreed. Stryll, you take the mutant. Selef, carry the one called Spock."

"Sekan," T'Aka objected, "he bleeds badly, and is too weak to contain the flow. We must bind up his leg."

Sekan frowned. "Very well -- but be swift about it, T'Aka. I will waste no more time here."

She nodded as she moved to where Spock knelt. "Lie down," she instructed, placing her hands on Spock's shoulders and pushing him gently back against the sand. "I will bandage your injury. You must disregard the pain. Once we are back at our camp, our healer will help you."

Spock nodded and closed his eyes as he felt the pressure of her hands begin to bind his leg. He turned his mind inward, in an attempt to control the pain, but after a moment he felt the first wave of unconsciousness begin to enfold him. Very slowly, he slipped into the dark void.

He awoke to darkness, and to a pressure on his leg which sent his mind screaming with pain. A mumbled voice brought him abruptly alert.

"He wakes, T'Ena."

"Leave us, then. Tend the mutant."

Spock fought to clear his vision and focused on the woman who had just spoken. Her image became clear with startling suddenness, and Spock stiffened. "Mother!" he said hoarsely, trying to push himself up.

Strong arms clamped on his shoulders and pushed him back. "I am T'Ena," the woman before him said. "I am a healer. You must remain very still."

Spock sank back into the folds of a soft quilt and studied the woman's face intently. It wasn't Amanda, as he had first believed, but the resemblance was astonishing. The woman before him, however,



was definitely a Vulcan, and her dark eyes watched him with concern.

"I have halted the bleeding temporarily," she told him. "But you must place yourself in the healing trance before it is too late."

She reached down and touched his bandaged leg. "The wound was most serious. Much blood was lost, and there is still a chance you may not survive it."

Spock shook his head weakly, unable to tear his eyes from the woman's face. "My friend... " he said finally. "How is he?"

"The mutant? He shall live. His wound is not serious." Her eyes narrowed. "He is like no other mutant I have ever seen. He has many differences. Even you are different than us... not in obvious ways, but there are subtle differences I found while I was containing your blood flow. Are all those of the ShiKahr Clan like you?"

Spock shook his head, remaining silent.

"I see," the healer replied. However, her eyes watched him suspiciously. "This manner of dress you wear -- I have seen the Clan of ShiKahr on occasion and none dress as strangely as you."

His glance faltered for a moment before he said, "It is a new manner of dress my Clan has adopted."

Looking away from her again, he began studying his surroundings. They were in a hut-like dwelling, and as Spock looked closer he saw that the walls and ceiling were made of a mixture of sand and plant sap. It was a hut typical of ancient Vulcan. In one corner of the room, he saw McCoy being tended by the woman who had been among their capturers.

"The mutant needs water much more frequently than we," Spock said, looking back to the healer. "His skin must be kept cool, and he must -- "

"He will be taken care of, Spock of ShiKahr," T'Ena interrupted. "You would be wise to think of your own health and place yourself in the healing trance."

Spock leaned back, but shook his head. "I will wait until I can be sure that my fri... that the mutant will be all right."

T'Ena looked at him with disapproval. "Do not wait too long. Your life is not worth that of a mutant." She stood. "T'Aka will tend you. I will return if you wish my assistance." She turned and left the hut.

The woman who had been with McCoy approached Spock. "You are a fool not to self-heal," she admonished. "You place your life in great danger."

Spock disregarded her. He craned his neck to look at McCoy.

"I am T'Aka," the woman said abruptly, moving to block his line of vision. "I am daughter to Stakr and T'Kin -- both great warriors."

He glanced at her only briefly, then grabbed for a hand-hold on the wall closest to him. He struggled to stand.

"Are you mad?" T'Aka exclaimed, reaching out to help him steady himself. "You invite death! T'Ena instructed you to remain still!"

Spock said nothing. With her help, he limped to where McCoy lay. Carefully, he sat down beside the doctor and reached out to find a pulse.

"A hideous creature," T'Aka commented, looking at the unconscious human. "He should have been killed at birth."

Spock glared at her. "Why?" he said, irritated. "Because he is different? Is that a reason to slay a man? He has qualities far more valuable than yours or mine. Would you waste such a being, just because his appearance is not the same as your own?"

There was a brief silence as T'Aka stared at Spock. Then she shrugged. "You are a fool -- and a wise man," she said quietly. "Dangerous traits for a man in these surroundings, Spock of ShiKahr. It would be wise if you held your tongue around Sekan. He feels threatened by men like you."



Spock looked at her oddly before turning his attention back to McCoy. He was startled that he had allowed the woman's ignorance to anger him so, and he took a deep breath and tried to calm himself.

McCoy's pulse was good. Spock inspected the bandage around his head wound. "I would like fresh water brought to him," he ordered. "As cool as possible."

T'Aka looked at him warily before nodding. "I shall bring nourishment for you also," she said, standing. "It would be a pity for you to die, for you have qualities of your own worth admiration." She turned then, and left the hut.

Spock puzzled over her words for a moment. Then he put his hand on the doctor's shoulder and shook it. "McCoy! McCoy!"

The doctor's eyelids fluttered and opened. He stared blankly at Spock and furrowed his brow in confusion. "Spock?" he asked hoarsely.

"Yes, doctor. You will be comfortable if you remain still. I will have water for you in a moment."

McCoy nodded. His eyes narrowed as he studied his surroundings. "Spock... what is this place? Where are we?"

"We are on Vulcan, Doctor. However, our crash has created a -- a condition which is beyond my comprehension. Somehow we have been... transported to Vulcan's past. We have been captured by a clan of Vulcans from the city of Ta-ham'n."

McCoy stared at him incredulously. "Wait a minute, Spock. What do you mean, we're back in Vulcan's past?"

"I mean exactly that, Doctor. These Vulcans are barbaric -- perhaps ancient ancestors of mine."

"Then -- how do we get back to our own time?"

Spock looked away. "I do not know yet... I have not had time to study the situation." He turned back to McCoy, wincing as he shifted position. He closed his eyes against a wave of dizziness and felt strong arms steadying him.

When he opened his eyes, he found McCoy sitting up and supporting him. "What about that leg of yours?" the doctor demanded.

Spock drew a deep breath, straightening up. "They called a Vulcan healer to stop the blood flow when I was unable to do so myself."

"And did he heal it?"

"No, doctor -- that ability is beyond any healer. I must attempt that myself, when there is sufficient time."

"*Time!*" the doctor bellowed. "You'd better start healing it now! You look terrible, Spock -- how much blood did you lose?"

"A considerable amount," Spock admitted, lowering his head to his arms as another assault of weakness struck.

"C'mon, Spock, lie down. Start the healing."

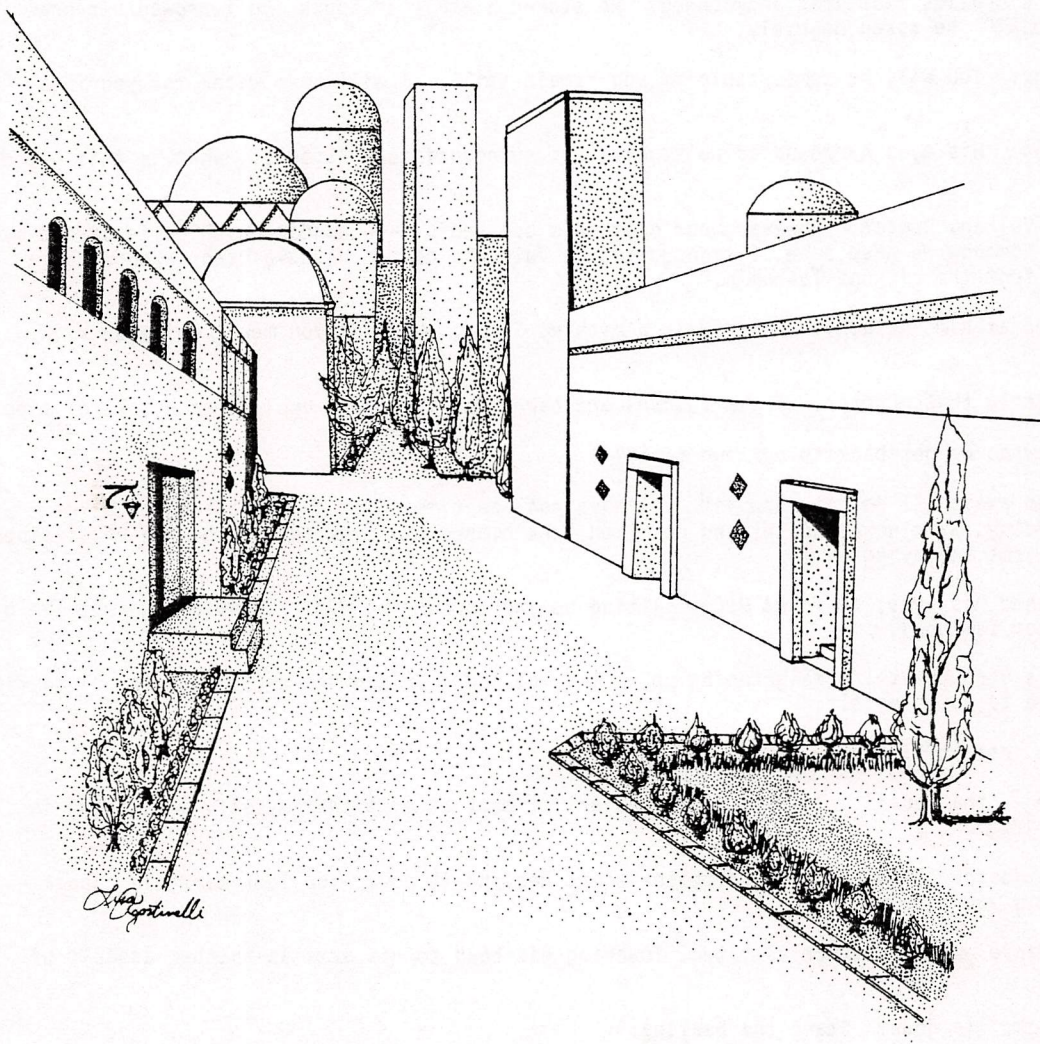
"No... not yet," Spock objected. "There are many things I must be certain of, before I attempt that. First, I must tell you, Doctor: this Clan thinks we are members of a rival clan from Shikahr. They think my father is a powerful member of that clan, who will pay handsomely for our return."

He looked at McCoy more closely. "Doctor... they consider you to be a mutant."

"A mutant?" McCoy exclaimed.

"Yes. In this time period, Vulcans had no contact with alien races. They believed themselves the only intelligent race in existence. The one logical way to pass you off to them was by naming you a mutant -- such were not uncommon in ancient Vulcan."







"I see." McCoy frowned. "Well... as soon as you can heal that wound, we'll have to make some kind of escape."

"That may not be an easy task, Doctor. Most certainly we will be heavily guarded, and -- " He stopped abruptly as T'Aka entered the hut, carrying a small urn. She looked them both over with suspicious eyes as she moved to where they sat.

She knelt beside Spock and held the urn out to him. "Here is the water you wanted," she said, glancing at McCoy. "The mutant looks nearly recovered."

"He is weak still, and requires rest," Spock replied, handing the urn to McCoy. The doctor took it eagerly and drank his fill, finally pouring some into his hands and bathing his face.

"Drink only what is needed, Doctor," Spock cautioned in English. "Water is not plentiful, on my planet."

"You speak a strange language to this mutant," T'Aka said suddenly. "Why?"

"It is a -- a custom of my people," Spock lied. "The mutant cannot answer in the common language."

"Indeed?" she returned, her dark eyes glued to McCoy. After a tense moment, she turned to Spock and placed a hand on his arm. "I prepare food for you -- a fresh kill from this morning's hunt."

Spock recoiled inwardly at the thought of consuming animal flesh, but remembered well that ancient Vulcans had been meat eaters, and ferocious hunters. "I cannot consume the flesh of an animal," he told her hesitantly. "By my own preference, I dine on roots and vegetables. The mutant, however, would benefit from your offer of meat."

T'Aka's eyes narrowed as she watched the Vulcan. "You should not worry for the Vulcan," she admonished. "It is *you* who are in need of strength and food."

Her hand moved up his arm and touched his face lightly. Her dark eyes peered deeply into his own. After a moment, she pulled away and stood. "But I will gather the food you request."

Watching her quizzically until she left the hut, Spock finally dropped his head back into his arms and let his weariness envelope him.

"Spock -- this is stupid," McCoy said sharply. "Put yourself into the healing trance now, before it's too late." He gripped the sagging shoulders and pushed until Spock lay down. Inspecting Spock's bandaged thigh, he found a faint tinge of green seeping through the white cloth. "You're beginning to bleed again, Spock. You've got to begin healing!"

"No, Doctor," Spock protested, opening his eyes. "The healing process would take a good part of a day -- perhaps longer. I must establish some sort of agreement with these people and be assured that you will not be harmed while I was in the trance."

He held up a hand to halt McCoy's protests. "You must understand, Doctor -- these Vulcans are irrational -- barbaric. They would not hesitate to enter your mind with a meld. If they were to do that, they would also find out the truth about our origins, and discover that we are of no value to them. We would both be killed."

His eyes closed again, and his facial muscles tightened with pain. "No... I cannot place myself in a trance. Not yet. I will direct T'Aka to bring the healer. She will attempt to halt the blood flow again." He sighed wearily.

"Dammit! If only I had my medical kit!" McCoy cursed. He looked at the Vulcan sullenly. "I'm sorry, Spock. I wish I could help you... at least give you something for the pain..."

"There is no need for you to apologize, Doctor," Spock assured him, though his eyes remained closed. "I understand your desire to help me, and your intentions are... appreciated."

McCoy glanced at him and sat back. "Well... at least if you get some food into you, you'll get back some strength." He gestured towards the hut's entrance. "That Vulcan woman... she kinda had her eye on you, Spock. I think she likes you."

Spock's eyes opened as he raised an eyebrow in McCoy's direction. "Believe me, Doctor -- she would just as soon slice my throat open. Please remember that ancient Vulcans were extremely treacherous."



"Yes... I'll remember that, Mr. Spock," McCoy grinned, teasing.

Spock nodded. "I'm sure you will, Doctor. I'm also sure you will continue to remind me of that fact in the future."

"Now, Spock..." McCoy chuckled innocently. "You don't think I'd rub it in, do you?"

"That is *exactly* what I think."

The doctor laughed loudly. "Well... I've got to admit, it is strange, seeing emotional Vulcans -- for once."

"Indeed, Doctor," Spock agreed. "I find it most... disquieting."

McCoy grinned, then turned his head toward the door as T'Aka entered carrying two bowls. Looking at the doctor with disgust, she handed one bowl to him, and knelt next to Spock.

"I have prepared vegetables for you to eat," she said, placing the bowl on the dirt floor. Her brows contracted as she pulled aside Spock's torn pantleg to look at the bandage. Seeing the growing stain, she said, "I will get T'Ena," and left hurriedly.

Spock merely nodded, closing his eyes once more in an effort to control the pain. Suddenly, without warning, he felt unconsciousness begin to overtake him. After a moment's panic, he surrendered to the void.

There was a pressure in his head, a power drawing on his mind. For a moment, he felt himself floating in a realm bordering non-existence. Then a surge of power flooded his body, and knowledge came to him. He panicked, his eyes blinking open, and cried, "NO!"

T'Ena's fingers remained on his temples as she looked at him. "I care not who or what you are, Spock," she said evenly. "I merely attempt to heal. Do not fight the meld I must establish."

"No..." Spock protested again, weakly.

"If I do not continue this meld, I shall be unable to curtail the flow of blood," T'Ena replied. "You will die, Spock. Will that profit your situation, or help your friend?"

Spock's eyes narrowed sharply.

"Yes... I have seen something of what is in your mind," T'Ena admitted. "But my concern is for your survival. You must let me help."

Spock's face was drawn into a grimace of pain as he finally nodded. T'Ena positioned her long fingers on his face, and Spock reluctantly opened his mind to her.

McCoy watched the two Vulcans from across the room. After a few minutes, he saw the Vulcan woman withdraw her hands from Spock's face. Spock's eyes opened.

McCoy moved to the First Officer. "Spock?.... Are you all right? Spock!"

"Yes... yes, I am... stronger, Doctor," Spock whispered. "T'Ena has stopped the blood flow again."

McCoy watched as the healer began to redress Spock's leg with clean bandages. He winced when he saw the open wound. "You've got to self-heal now, Spock! Your leg is getting worse, and you've lost too much blood as it is. I doubt even the healer could save you if you started bleeding again."

"I know, Doctor," Spock agreed solemnly. "However, I must have some nourishment, for strength, before I place myself in a trance." He looked at T'Ena as she fixed his leg. "I must also speak with her."

"Well... that other females took away her vegetables," McCoy informed him. "I was thinking... maybe they could be made into a soup for you. It'd give you strength."

"Yes," Spock agreed. "I shall instruct T'Ena to prepare it."

"You know... I almost fell over when she came into the hut," McCoy commented, nodding to the



healer. "She's a ringer for Amanda."

"The resemblance was startling to me, also. We can only hope she possesses my mother's understanding."

McCoy looked at him curiously. "Why?"

Spock's eyes grew troubled. "When she contained the blood flow this time, it was necessary for her to have full control over my mind. She knows who we are, Doctor -- and where we are from."

McCoy's eyebrows shot up.

"She does not understand completely," Spock continued, "but she knows we are not what we claim to be. If she does not keep this knowledge confidential... if Sekan finds out that we are of no value to him, we will most certainly be killed."

McCoy frowned and looked at T'Ena. "Then I guess it's all up to her."

Spock nodded, and struggled to sit up a little. "T'Ena," he called, switching back to the antique dialect, "Perhaps those vegetables I asked T'Aka to bring might be made into a broth. It would give me the strength I need for healing..."

"T'Aka prepares such a broth for you now, by my order," T'Ena interrupted. "Then you must place yourself in the trance, Spock."

"I shall," Spock assured her, but his eyes darkened. "T'Ena, what you know of my friend and me now -- you know we are men of peace. Will you keep this confidence for us?"

The woman's gaze held his for a long moment. "What a healer learns through a mind-meld is always held secret," she said at last. "I do not understand how you have been brought here... but I do not fear you, and you pose no threat to my people."

She glanced toward the hut's door and lowered her voice. "But beware T'Aka, and Sekan. They would enter your mind uninvited -- and you would be dead men. I will remain with you while you are in trance, Spock, and will prevent them from gaining access to your mind while you are vulnerable. Once healed, you must keep a rigid barrier between you and them."

"Understood, T'Ena," Spock returned. Then he looked to McCoy.

"I will tell them that it would be dangerous to enter his mind," T'Ena said. "Because he is a mutant -- or they think he is -- they will believe me."

Spock nodded. "You do me a service I can never repay. T'Ena, my gratitude to you is unbounding."

T'Ena bowed her head slightly as a tiny smile touched her lips. "I have a great desire to see peace come to all our people, Spock. The knowledge that this will someday be the situation is payment enough."

Spock's eyebrows rose as he returned her smile.

T'Aka entered the hut then, carrying a steaming bowl. She moved directly to Spock and sat down beside him. "I am glad T'Ena was able to save you," she said to him. "Eat now -- then you must heal."

Spock nodded, accepting the bowl from her. He took long sips of the hot liquid. When the bowl was empty, he lay back and shut his eyes. "T'Ena? I am ready."

The healer moved next to him, and McCoy watched as Spock grew rigid in his trance. T'Ena's long fingers lay lightly on his temples.

They remained like that for hours. Neither moved -- they barely breathed. McCoy observed them with awe, and T'Aka sat in a corner, her eyes never leaving Spock's face.

It was when Spock was in his seventh hour of trance that the hut door crashed open and Sekan entered. T'Aka scrambled to her feet, her eyes wide, and McCoy watched as the huge Vulcan approached her. He spoke to her in a loud voice, but McCoy understood nothing of their conversation. It was clear, though, that the two were arguing.

Abruptly T'Ena shouted at Sekan, and he pushed her aside roughly. Then he knelt next to Spock,



spreading his clumsy fingers and placing them on the tranced man's face.

Alarm bells buzzed in McCoy's brain. He flung himself at the larger Vulcan, tearing Sekan's hands from Spock's head. Sekan gave him a single startled look before landing a backhanded blow on the doctor's jaw that sent McCoy sprawling to the floor. He heard T'Ena shout once more. When his head cleared, he saw that Spock's eyes were open.

The two Vulcan men glared at each other defiantly. Finally Sekan stood and stormed angrily out of the room.

"Are you all right?" McCoy asked, stumbling to Spock's side.

He nodded and closed his eyes for a moment. Then he said, "You've been injured, Doctor."

McCoy dabbed his sleeve to his mouth and wiped away blood. He shrugged. "I'll be okay. How about you, Spock?"

"I am better. However, I was unable to complete the healing process. Sekan's intrusion broke my concentration."

"I'll take a look at your leg, then," McCoy said, pulling at the bandages carefully. T'Ena moved beside Spock, and T'Aka watched from the corner as the last of the cloth was unravelled. The gash along the leg was only half-healed.

"Well, it is better. Still a nasty wound, though."

"However, I believe I shall have no further trouble with excessive bleeding," Spock answered. His brows furrowed. "And I dare not place myself in the trance again."

"This Sekan fella," McCoy began. "He was tryin' to meld with your mind, wasn't he?"

"Yes, doctor. It is most important that he does not accomplish that. I cannot release the barriers I have erected now; it would be too dangerous."

McCoy nodded grimly. He looked up and smiled at T'Ena as she handed him fresh bandages for Spock's leg, and began to bind up the wound again.

"Sekan seems most determined to find the secrets of your mind," T'Aka said, approaching Spock.

"So it would seem," he returned. His eyes watched her stonily.

"T'Aka, leave us now," T'Ena ordered. "He must rest again, to regain his full strength."

T'Aka looked at the healer angrily, but nodded and left the hut.

As soon as she was gone, Spock's troubled glance turned to T'Ena. "It would be wise of you to take caution when T'Aka is near," she said. "Though she is not legally bonded to Sekan, she is his woman. He wants no other."

T'Ena's lips pursed in concentration. "You interest her... and that could be dangerous for you."

"I shall take caution, T'Ena," Spock said quietly. "Once again, my gratitude for your help."

A smile crossed the woman's lips. "I shall leave you, also -- you must rest." She gestured in McCoy's direction. "This friend of yours seems to know much about healing. You will not require my assistance now."

She stood up. "I shall return in the morning."

Spock watched her leave, and laid his head back, sighing wearily, as McCoy finished bandaging his leg. "Doctor..." he said, after a moment, "I... appreciate your intervention when Sekan attempted to meld with me." He hesitated, and continued, "However, you could have been seriously injured."

"Yes... I could've," McCoy agreed. "But I wasn't," he grinned, "and it was either attack Sekan, or let him... attack you. I really didn't have much of a choice, Spock."

Nodding slowly, Spock said, "I admit that I, too, see no alternative other than the one you



chose." His eyebrows furrowed.

"I am appalled by the disregard Sekan has of one's personal thoughts. It is most distressing for me to see, firsthand, how barbaric my ancestors truly were."

"Well, we all have skeletons in our closet, Spock," McCoy assured him.

Spock's eyebrows flew into his hairline. "Skeletons?" he whispered, awed.

"An old Earth expression," McCoy explained, chuckling. "Never mind... I didn't expect you to understand."

Spock's sigh held a hint of consternation. After a moment, he said, "You look fatigued, Doctor."

McCoy nodded, stifling a yawn. "I am, a little," he admitted. His expression grew suddenly grim. "Spock... how are we gonna get back to our own time?"

The Vulcan officer took a breath and stared at the dirt floor. "I do not yet know, Doctor," he confessed. "Our transferral to this time period defies logical explanation. However, I think our only chance -- if there is indeed a chance -- would be to return to the area of the accident and proceed from there."

"It seems about hopeless," McCoy muttered.

"Perhaps. In any case, I shall need data to determine if we may yet succeed in escaping this age." His eyes darkened. "If not... then we will be stranded in this time period."

He pulled himself unsteadily to his feet, holding up a hand as McCoy started to protest. "I must exercise, Doctor, if I am to have full use of this leg. We may be forced to make our escape soon, and I must be prepared." He began to limp slowly around the confines of the hut, testing the stamina of the injured limb.

McCoy watched disapprovingly for a few minutes. Then he said, "Y'know, Spock... I'm kinda gettin' the feeling of how it must be for you, on the *Enterprise*. An alien among humans. I mean... here I am, the only human among Vulcans, and it's, well... it's kinda discomforting."

Spock stopped his pacing, and looked at McCoy quizzically.

"You know what I mean," the doctor continued. "The roles are sorta... reversed. I can see, now, how it must be for you sometimes." A rueful grin of sympathy touched his lips. "It's not easy being an alien, is it, Spock?"

Spock's eyes looked away from the doctor then. He said quietly, "No, Doctor... it is not. But I am content with my life aboard the *Enterprise*."

"Yeah, but... doesn't it get lonely, sometimes?" McCoy pressed him.

Spock paused, and nodded reluctantly. "Sometimes," he admitted. Walking back to the corner, he slumped into a sitting position and rubbed his thigh to rid himself of the ache throbbing through it.

"Spock..." McCoy said, breaking the silence again, "you know that... well... when I tease you, it's... it's really all in fun.. It's never meant to hurt you."

He looked at the doctor, a glitter of amusement in his eyes. "I know, Doctor," Spock said.

McCoy grinned as he laid back and closed his eyes. "Goodnight, Spock," he said softly.

"Goodnight, Doctor," the Vulcan returned, the hint of a smile lurking on his lips. After a moment, he, too, closed his eyes and settled back.

A faint sound awoke him with a start. When his eyes adjusted to the darkness, he found T'Aka kneeling next to him, a tiny smile on her face.

"What do you want?" Spock asked.



"I have come to make you an offer," the woman whispered, moving closer. "Sekan sends his men tomorrow to ShiKahr. They will demand ransom from your father."

Spock stiffened. He sat up slowly.

"They will be three days travelling," T'Aka continued. "Time enough for you and the mutant to escape -- with my help."

He looked at her suspiciously. "Why do you offer your help?"

T'Aka's smile widened as she reached out and touched his arm. "It is said that ShiKahr holds great wealth." Her hand travelled up his arm. "And you interest me. I will help you reach ShiKahr -- if you take me as your wife."

Spock's eyebrows moved upward in surprise. "Are you not Sekan's woman?"

"I have been his woman, but we are not yet bonded legally as mates," T'Aka explained, her hand brushing his neck as she pressed herself closer. "But the madness is beginning to burn within him even now... it will be only a short time before he wishes me to bond."

Her lips pressed against his neck for a moment, then she drew back. "I wish to be yours -- not his."

Spock stared at her, frowning. She was alluring, her closeness discomforting. He moved away from her slightly. "How could you help us escape?"

She smiled evilly, her hand tracing the thin lines of his face. "There are many in this camp who would listen to my word over Sekan's. I would promise them wealth out of ShiKahr, and they would aid our escape."

Her smile widened. "If you wish it, Spock... I will kill Sekan as he sleeps."

Appalled by her suggestion, Spock shook his head. "That would not be necessary."

"Then you accept my proposal?" T'Aka whispered, her finger tracing the outline of his ear.

"I did not say that," he returned, shifting uncomfortably.

Pressing herself against the length of his body, she said softly, "Join with me, Spock. I will please you well." Her fingers brushed against his temples, lingering there. "Share your mind with me," she said, her breath quickening. "I wish to be yours."

Caught up by the rush of desire that suddenly flooded him, it was a few seconds before Spock felt her thoughts like tiny tendrils begin to probe his mind. Startled, he grabbed her wrists and pushed her fingers away from him.

Her dark eyes flickered in anger for a second before her smile returned. "Let me join with you," she coaxed, her hand reaching out.

"NO!" Spock said firmly, tightening his hold on her wrist.

T'Aka pulled away, her eyes blazing. "You refuse me?" she asked incredulously.

"Yes," he returned, turning his face away, appalled by her deviousness.

She scrambled to her feet and stood over him, panting furiously. "This night you shall regret, Spock of ShiKahr. I do not offer myself to many men -- and none refuse me! You are a fool not to accept my proposal... and you *will* regret it!"

She stormed out of the hut.

"Now what was that all about?" McCoy's voice floated out of the darkness after T'Aka had gone.

Spock looked after her with troubled eyes and slumped against the wall. "I may just have spoiled our chances for escape, Doctor," he mumbled, almost inaudibly.

McCoy stared at the Vulcan, and moved toward him. "What do you mean?"

Spock kept his eyes averted from McCoy's. His thigh had begun to ache again, and he rubbed it.



"T'Aka came to offer us a chance to escape," he said quietly. "She wanted to meld with me... to become my... property."

"Well?"

Spock's eyes darted to the doctor for a moment before he looked away again. "I could not accept that, Doctor. If she were permitted to enter my mind, she would learn the truth. T'Aka wants the wealth and power of a ShiKahr Clansman. Discovering that I possessed neither, she would return to Sekan."

He sighed heavily and added, "Although I believe she shall do that in any case, now."

"Why?"

"I... rejected her. Apparently, that has never happened before. She was quite... agitated."

"Uh-oh," McCoy said. "Hell hath no fury... "

"I beg your pardon, Doctor?"

"Never mind," McCoy said, somberly. "Couldn't you have... well... placated her for a while? At least long enough for her to help us escape?"

A small frown creased the Vulcan's lips. "You do not understand, Doctor. A physical joining, for a Vulcan, must be accompanied by mind-link. To do otherwise is -- " he paused and shuddered -- " -- perversion. She would refuse to join without mental contact."

McCoy nodded, looking closely at Spock. "Here, let me do that," he ordered, moving beside him and putting his hands on the Vulcan's injured leg. He began to massage the muscles cramped with painful tension. Spock leaned back and sighed gratefully. "Still painful?" McCoy inquired.

Spock hesitated, but agreed. "Inactivity causes the muscles to tighten. I must exercise it more often." He rested, summoning his depleted reserves, as McCoy continued his ministrations.

"Doctor?" he asked, after a moment. "Are you able to travel?"

McCoy looked at him, puzzled, and touched the bandage on his own forehead. "What -- this? It's nothing, Spock -- not even painful. Sure, I can travel."

Spock nodded contemplatively, steeping his fingers. "Very well. Our attempt at escape will have to be soon -- within two days, at any rate."

"Why?"

"T'Aka informed me that Sekan will send out some men in the morning to take word of our capture to ShiKahr. We cannot be here when they return with the news that we are not of the ShiKahr Clan."

"I see." McCoy frowned. He looked at Spock's leg and shook his head. "Spock, you can't travel on this leg of yours. The wound is still very bad."

"Doctor, there is no choice. I will have to travel." He squirmed a little as pain twitched through his thigh. "Perhaps a small splint of sorts could be fashioned to keep the pressure off my injured leg."

"I don't know, Spock," McCoy mumbled, continuing to massage the Vulcan's leg. Then he sat back and rubbed a hand wearily over his face.

"I suggest you continue to rest, Doctor," Spock said, noticing McCoy's gesture. "We will need all our strength when the time for escape comes." He, too, slumped back, closing his eyes.

After a long while, Spock opened his eyes. McCoy was fast asleep. Sitting up and clasping his hands in a position of meditation, Spock spent the rest of the night deep in thought.

It was approaching dawn, and light was beginning to filter through the cracks in the walls, when the door burst open and T'Ena entered. Her eyes were wide with fright and she moved quickly to Spock's side.



"What is it?" Spock asking, breaking out of his meditative trance.

"Was T'Aka here last night?" she demanded quietly.

"Yes."

"Why did she come?"

"She... she offered me help in escaping," he answered. "She wanted me to bond with her, and take her as my property."

"And?"

"I refused."

T'Ena sat back and bit her lip, her eyes troubled. "Sekan is in blood fever and demands T'Aka bond with him. She refused -- and named *you* her champion."

Spock stiffened. He stared at the floor as he said quietly, "I will refuse the challenge, of course."

"You cannot," she told him, miserably. "T'Aka claims you bedded her last night. If you refuse the challenge, Sekan has the right to probe your mind for proof of T'Aka's words. And if he probes your mind and discovers..."

Spock slumped against the wall, his facial muscles drawn. "Either way is certain death," he said tonelessly. "Because of my unhealed wound, Sekan would far outmatch me in a contest. But if he enters my mind he will learn the truth."

He sighed, and glanced over at McCoy, who was only now beginning to rouse from sleep. Then he extracted a small object from a compartment in his belt. "My friend will need your help, T'Ena, if he is to have any chance for escape. I beg this favor from you..."

He held out his hand. In his palm was the turquoise amulet he had meant to give Amanda. "This is all I have to offer for payment."

Her eyes widened as she turned away from him. "I do not require payment from you, Spock," she said sharply, but her voice was muffled.

He lowered his hand, reaching out to touch her arm gently. "I did not mean to offend. But... perhaps the amulet can buy you cooperation from others."

T'Ena's eyes glistened with wetness as she turned back to him then. Silently she held out her hand, and Spock placed the amulet in her palm.

"If my friend can be taken to the point where we were found, there may be a chance he can discover how to get back to our own time. If not, he will be stranded here. Take him to ShiKahr, if that happens -- see if they will accept another healer there. If not... if he is to die," he paused to look back to McCoy, "... then I must rely on you to make his death quick -- and painless."

She lowered her head and nodded. "All you ask of me shall be done," she whispered, reaching out to touch his cheek lightly. "Your death will bring me much grief, Spock. I admire you more than any other Vulcan I have known."

Two fingers touched his temple, and her thoughts caressed his mind for a brief second. Then she stood and looked down at him.

"May you have peace, my son." A tear trickled down her cheek.

Spock watched her, once again moved by her resemblance to Amanda -- and by her use of the word "son". A faint smile of gratitude remained on his lips even after she had gone.

"What's the matter *now*, Spock?" McCoy wiped the sleep from his eyes as he sat up.

"Nothing, Doctor -- this does not concern you," he lied. He reached for a pile of cloth and began binding his already bandaged leg.

"What're you doin', then?" the doctor demanded.



The Vulcan looked at him and frowned. "Doctor... I want you to remember: whatever happens, you are to trust T'Ena. She will help you as much as possible." He considered saying more, but finally started to work on his leg again.

"Spock -- what in blue blazes is goin' on!" McCoy demanded, grabbing his arm. Before he could respond, the hut door opened and T'Aka entered, flanked by two guards. She stood before Spock and smiled triumphantly, her eyes ablaze.

"You will soon suffer the result of your foolishness, Spock of ShiKahr," she taunted.

Spock struggled to his feet as the guards moved in. One held out a long purple sash. Spock accepted it, removing his shirt before wrapping the cloth around his waist.

McCoy was still demanding to be told what was happening. But Spock, his eyes fixed on T'Aka, did not hear him. The guards directed them forward, and they left the hut and stood under the blinding Vulcan sun.

They were led for a short distance to a place that struck McCoy with a chilling fear. Huge slabs of stone, towering monoliths, stood in the pink Vulcan dawn. Alien gongs and firepits lined the clearing between the stones. The familiarity of the scene made McCoy look questioningly at Spock.

"T'Aka has named me her champion," the Vulcan said tonelessly, answering the unasked question. "Sekan is in blood fever. We will battle -- to the death."

"Spock, are you crazy? You can't fight Sekan! Not with that leg of yours -- you can barely stand!"

"There is no choice," Spock replied. His dark eyes were concerned as he looked at the doctor. "Remember what I have said... whatever happens, place your trust in T'Ena."

Then he turned back as the sound of bells broke the silence of the morning.

McCoy watched with fascination and growing horror as the scene unfolded. The procession was almost identical to the one he had witnessed at Spock's ceremony years before -- the faces were different, but the procedures were the same. A sedan was carried into the clearing. Seated on the top was an old man, his face harsh with the lines of age. His body was adorned with trinkets of elaborately sculpted metal. As the chair was lowered, a tall Vulcan male approached it. McCoy could see that it was Sekan. The look in the powerful Vulcan's eyes made him shudder. Sekan was already deep in *plak-tow*.

As if in some horrible dream, McCoy watched as T'Aka approached and rang one of the huge gongs. Beside him, he heard Spock's breath catch for a second. He turned, and found Spock's eyes on him.

"No matter what transpires, Doctor, do not interfere," Spock said firmly. "It is your only chance for life."

"But what about you?" McCoy objected, but Spock reached out and gripped his arm.

"Do not concern yourself with me, Doctor. It is important only that you do not interfere. Remember that."

McCoy saw the pleading in the dark eyes. Reluctantly, he nodded.

Spock approached the ancient leader and saluted him, accepting the challenge. He could see T'Aka, smiling, out of the corner of his eye. He ignored her, turned, and looked straight into the fevered eyes of Sekan.

The huge man stood deep in *plak-tow*, his eyes glassy. The muscles in his forearms stood out as if carved from stone. In his logical mind, Spock calculated his chances against him. The odds were not favorable.

A heavy object forced into his hands roused Spock from his thoughts. The *lirpa* gleamed menacingly in the sunlight.

The command was given. The battle began.

Spock dodged Sekan's first slash easily, dancing out of the path of the razor-sharp blade,



butting away the cudgel end of the weapon with his own. He drew back, preparing for the next attack. With unbelievable quickness, Sekan struck out again with the blade of the *lirpa*. Spock parried, and managed to connect on Sekan's forearm with his cudgel. The larger man staggered, regained his balance, and charged once more.

Holding his position until the last second, Spock jerked aside and brought the cudgel smashing against Sekan's back. The huge man fell heavily on the ground, rolling onto his back. Seeing an opening, Spock approached him with his *lirpa* raised.

With lightning speed, Sekan struck out with one foot, hitting Spock's wounded thigh with all his might. Crying out in pain, Spock staggered backwards and fell, agony wrenching through every nerve in his body. He fought to clear his vision through the blurring pain, and instinctively raised the weapon again as Sekan approached. Using his last strength, Spock pushed him away and stumbled to his feet. A wave of dizziness enveloped him; glancing down at his thigh, he saw green staining the bandage and spreading swiftly. Taking a deep breath, Spock looked back to Sekan -- who lunged again.

The fight was long and furious, and for a while it looked like an even match. Then, weak from loss of blood through the re-opened wound, Spock began to falter, slowing into mere defensiveness. A strong blow with the cudgel end of the *lirpa* sent him sprawling over again, and his own weapon jolted from his grasp.

"Spock!"

He heard McCoy call his name from across the clearing. Weakly, he held up a hand in restraint. Then he saw that T'Ena was restraining the horrified doctor, though her own face was pale and wet. He sighed gratefully -- and heard Sekan approach.

The big Vulcan towered over him. Slowly, he raised his weapon pointing the razored edge downwards. Too weak to attempt any further defense, Spock closed his eyes in defeat as Sekan brought the *lirpa* down with a vicious thrust.

An instant of agonising pain -- Spock cried out as the blade split his sternum, cut through tendons, muscles, arteries, severed his backbone and imbedded itself beneath him in the hard ground. Faintly, he heard his name being called once more before blackness overwhelmed him and reality ended.

"Spock? Spock?"

The voice was back, soft and familiar. A cool dampness on his forehead roused him to open his eyes.

"Thank god," the voice whispered.

Struggling to clear his sight, Spock stiffened in shock. Amanda stood over him. Her eyes were wrinkled with concern but her lips were smiling.

"Spock," she repeated, reaching to stroke his face with the wet cloth.

Spock continued to gaze at her in confusion until another face moved into his line of vision.

Sarek. "You were seriously injured, Spock," his father explained softly. "Your mind suffered many delusions, during your recovery." Spock's brows lifted as Sarek continued. "I melded with you to help you regain strength, and I saw some of what your mind invented."

The lines of the older Vulcan's face softened. "It is good to have you recovered, my son. For a while we were not sure you would survive."

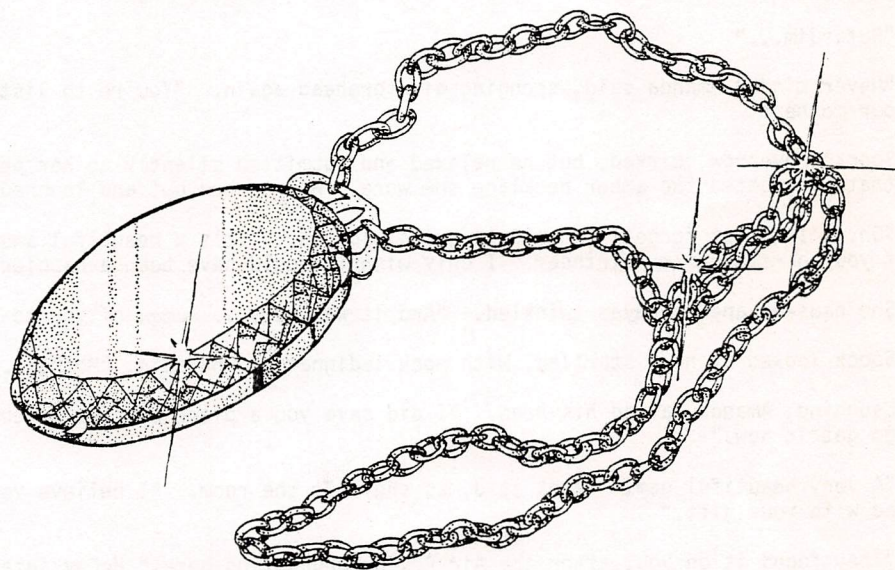
"How long?" Spock stammered, still somewhat stunned.

"Four days," a familiar voice called from across the room. Spock turned to see James Kirk and McCoy watching him.

"Captain!" Spock said in surprise. "And Dr. McCoy -- were you injured in the crash?"

"Not badly, Spock," the doctor assured him, running a medical scanner over the Vulcan officer. "Mild concussion, case of sunstroke, nothing serious. It was lucky that the Air Rescue came along when they did, though."







"Then Air Rescue did... "

"Yup, we were both unconscious, but they found us and brought us back here." McCoy ran the scanner over the wounded leg again. "That cut's comin' along just fine, Spock. It was pretty deep... your father helped you initiate the healing trance."

"What's the matter, Spock?" Kirk asked him. "You look -- confused."

"It is... nothing, Jim." Spock took a deep breath to dispel his confusion. "I am just... grateful... to be back."

"Back?" Kirk grinned, but he was plainly puzzled. "Back from where?"

"From the chronological delusions of his mind," Sarek interrupted. He almost smiled as he looked at his son. "It is very gratifying to have you back, my son."

Spock returned the affection of his gaze and struggled to sit up.

"Oh, no, you're not going anywhere," his mother chided, gently pushing him back. "Your captain said there's no hurry, so you'll just lie here and rest."

"That's right, Spock," Kirk agreed. "We've got extra travel time, and nothing important has come in from Starfleet Command. You just worry about recuperating."

"But, Jim..."

"Never mind," Amanda said, sponging his forehead again. "You're to listen to your captain -- and your mother!"

Spock's eyebrow quirked, but he relaxed and submitted silently to her pampering. It was only then that he spotted the amber necklace she wore. He reached out and touched it gently.

"Oh... I almost forgot!" Amanda's smile widened. "It's a beautiful amulet, Spock! So thoughtful of you to remember my birthday. I only wish it could have been a happier occasion for *you*."

She paused, and her eyes twinkled. "And it was very... *human* of you to try and surprise me."

Spock looked at her, startled. With mock indignation, he said, "Mother!..."

Laughing, Amanda patted his head. "I did save you a piece of cake -- to celebrate your recovery. I'll go get it now."

"A very beautiful gem," Sarek said, as she left the room. "I believe your mother was well pleased with your gift."

"They found it on you, after the Air Rescue brought us here," McCoy intervened. "I told Amanda it was your present to her. You know, Spock, it's a funny thing -- the rescue team went back and combed the crash area, but they couldn't find the other amulet you bought. The turquoise one."

Spock's eyes darted to the doctor. In the recesses of his mind, he recalled handing the gem to T'Ena. It had seemed so real... so...

No. It was impossible.

"Here you are!" Amanda handed him a plateful of cake. She stroked his hair, tousled it playfully. "My best present is having you well again, Spock."

Shrinking into his pillow in embarrassment, Spock saw the affection flooding the faces around him. Gradually, he relaxed. "You know, Doctor, I believe you were right."

"Huh?" McCoy asked. "Whaddaya mean?"

"The amber amulet..." Spock said, looking fondly at his mother. "It does compliment her eyes." He raised a forkful of cake to his mouth.



## The Dancer

An eventful shoreleave awaited one half  
of a Hoomin-Wulkin team,  
for Spunk didn't know it yet, but Klunk  
was stoned out of his bean.

Klunk had this scheme in mind for Spunk  
--his high was a mighty one--  
he led his buddy to a native Hukkan pub  
saying it would be interesting, fun.

Spunk glanced at his captain, but failed to note  
that Klunk seemed in a trance,  
so they sat, ordered shliphs, enjoyed the decor,  
and watched the dancers dance.

Spunk took a look around the pub  
this place not in his ken...  
Klunk half-supressed some hiccups, but when Spunk  
glanced, he just smiled at him.

Sybarin Dyn-Fluid was the cause  
of Klunk's half-smirky smile.  
Spunk was ignorant of the fact,  
but he'd find out in a while...

\*

\*

The star dancer in the Hukka pub  
was known as Madam L'Cest.  
She spied the Wulkin strolling into the place  
and she liked what he had dressed.

He was accompanied by a Hoomin  
but of him she took no note,  
it was the Wulkin who filled her eyes,  
on his form, she would dote:

His pointed ears, his upswept brow,  
his faces stoic set...  
and she thought to herself; 'Tonight,  
that's one Being I intend to get!!



'But how,' she mused, 'to make him notice me?'  
as she twirled in her bits of lace.  
Then she got an idea and, in a swirl of veils,  
sashayed over to their place:

and draped her bra across the blue-clad chest  
whispered: "Welcome to Hukka space."  
Watched the Hoomin grin, and the Wulkin blanch  
as grey shock filled his face.

"Don't get all tense," the dancer husked.  
"You'll have a real good time."  
"Wulkins' and I get along very well  
and it doesn't cost you a dime."

Gently prying his fingers from the chair,  
She pulled him up from his seat,  
and dragged him towards the rear of the pub  
for a little tete-a-tete.

"Spunk," Klunk said, "you've been selected.  
Thats the custom. Go on."  
"But--but," Spunk began, totally confused.  
Klunk winked. "Told you I'd be fun."

The Hukkan was becoming demanding now  
Spunk didn't know what to do.  
He called to his friend, but Klunk-the rat!  
just settled back and sipped his brew.

(Leaving Spunk to undergo all kinds of things  
that I'd never describe to you...!)

- Jocelyn Feaster

From an INTERPHASE II illo by Landon





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